United Nations S/PV.7821

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7821 st meeting

Wednesday, 30 November 2016, 9 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Seck	(Senegal)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mrs. Carrión
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

Non-proliferation/Democratic People's Republic of Korea

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council. Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-40713 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Non-proliferation/Democratic People's Republic of Korea

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Morocco, the Netherlands, Norway, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2016/999, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Morocco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Uruguay.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Angola, China, Egypt, France, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russian Federation, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

The President (*spoke in French*): The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2321 (2016).

I now give the floor to His Excellency the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: The Security Council has today taken strong action on one of the most enduring and pressing peace and security challenges of our time — the nuclear and ballistic missile activities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. I welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2321 (2016). Maintaining such unity is crucial to tackling security challenges on the Korean peninsula and beyond.

The Council first adopted a resolution on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea nuclear issue in 1993 (resolution 825 (1993)). Twenty-three years and six sanctions resolutions later, the challenge persists. This time, the Council has taken longer than ever before — nearly three months — in responding to a nuclear test by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the fifth such act. The time taken to reach agreement on the resolution vividly illustrates the complex nature of the challenge.

This year, the Council has met on nine occasions in emergency consultations in response to nuclear tests and ballistic missile activities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. This is an unprecedentedly high number. Since January, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has conducted two nuclear tests and at least 25 launches using ballistic missile technology, including launches of a satellite, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles. We must assume that, with each test or launch, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continues to make technological advances in its pursuit of a military nuclear capability. The increase in and nature of these activities pose an ever growing threat to regional security and the global non-proliferation regime.

Today's resolution includes the toughest and most comprehensive sanctions regime ever imposed by the Security Council. It sends an unequivocal message that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea must cease further provocative actions and comply fully with its international obligations. Targeted sanctions matter. Security Council sanctions represent the clear and unified will of the international community.

Yet sanctions are only as effective as their implementation. It is incumbent on all States Members of the United Nations to make every effort to ensure that these sanctions are fully implemented. Some States may have difficulty translating sanctions into their national regulatory regimes. Others may lack the capacity to enforce them within their territories. That is why we need international partnerships for capacity-building. Sanctions should be anchored in a comprehensive strategy for lasting peace and security.

We must remain committed to a peaceful, diplomatic and political solution to this complex and dangerous situation. As demonstrated by the agreement on Iran's nuclear programme, a diplomatic solution can be achieved if there is the will. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea must reverse its course and move onto the path of denuclearization through sincere dialogue. I reiterate my call on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to take the steps necessary to reduce tensions in the region.

It is important not to forget the country's acute humanitarian needs. The civilian population of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, including vulnerable groups such as the elderly and children, are particularly exposed to hardships, which are further aggravated by natural disasters. International humanitarian assistance remains vital for safeguarding the lives of millions in need. I also reiterate my call on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea authorities to engage with the international community to address the grave human rights situation and improve the living conditions of the country's people.

In addressing all these challenges, I would like to conclude by reaffirming the readiness of the United Nations to assist in any way possible.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank the Secretary-General for being here on such an important occasion.

We are here because of dangerous choices made by a State Member of the United Nations — the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea — including the choice to be the only country in the twenty-first century to conduct a nuclear test; the choice to defy the Council's clear and consistent requirements by testing nuclear devices twice this year alone; the choice to continue producing fissile material for its nuclear programme; the choice to accelerate prohibited ballistic missile launches to an unprecedent rate — more than two dozen since January, including from new delivery systems such as submarines; the choice to keep threatening neighbours and countries continents away with nuclear annihilation.

These choices reflect a calculated strategy. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is determined to refine its nuclear and ballistic missile technology to pose an even more potent threat to United Nations Member States and, more broadly, to international peace and security. Let us consider what the leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Kim Jong Un, said after testing an engine for a long-range missile in April — that North Korea

> "can tip new-type intercontinental ballistic rockets with more powerful nuclear warheads and keep any cesspool of evils in the Earth, including the United States mainland, within our striking range".

The United States recognizes China for working closely with us in negotiating the extremely rigorous and important resolution 2321 (2016). We are also grateful for the critically important contributions made by Japan and the Republic of Korea, which face a grave threat that one Korean official likened to living with a Cuban missile crisis every day.

Lately, the Council has been divided on many issues, but the unanimous adoption of new sanctions shows that, as long as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea pursues this dangerous and destabilizing path, the Council will impose ever harsher consequences on those responsible. In March, the Council adopted what were then the toughest sanctions to date on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, but that country remained as determined as ever to continue advancing its nuclear technology. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea found ways to continue diverting revenue from exports to fund its research. It tried to cover up its business dealings abroad, and it looked for openings to smuggle illicit materials by land, sea and air.

Today's resolution systematically goes after each of these illicit schemes. Let me highlight three ways in which the resolution breaks new and important ground.

First, the resolution imposes major new restrictions on the sources of hard currency, in particular coal exports, that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is using to pay for its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. Of course, resolution 2270 (2016) bans coal exports not exclusively used for what the Council called "livelihood purposes", but the coal revenues of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have remained about high, accounting for about one-third of its entire export revenue. Contrary to the letter and the spirit of resolution 2270 (2016), that coal export revenue has not been used to help the people of North Korea. It has been used to further build up the regime's illegal weapons programmes.

So the resolution imposes a new, binding cap on how much coal the Democratic People's Republic of Korea can ship out of the country, cutting what the country earns by approximately $700 million per year from its 2015 total, or more than 60 per cent of its coal export revenue. Much of this coal trade involves Democratic People's Republic of Korea companies with links to the regime and its prohibited nuclear and ballistic missile programmes. In addition, the resolution imposes a new ban on the export of copper, nickel, silver and zinc, which will eliminate another $100 million or more in annual hard-currency revenue for the regime. In total, therefore, the resolution will slash by at least $800 million per year, the hard currency that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has to fund its prohibited weapons programmes, which constitutes a full 25 per cent of its entire export revenues.

But we knew going into this negotiation that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has found itself masterful at using non-traditional means to stash currency, and the resolution goes after some of the less obvious ways that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea makes money. We have banned the export of monuments. The Council might ask why on earth would we ban the export of monuments. It turns out that exports such as a statue of Laurent Kabila, standing in Kinshasa today, two statues for which Robert Mugabe paid $5 million to be stood up in Zimbabwe upon his passing, and countless others found around the world generate tens of millions of dollars for the regime. We have called out countries that host Democratic People's Republic of Korea labourers by urging those countries to take steps to ensure that wages are not supporting the Democratic People's Republic of Korea regime's prohibited programmes.

Secondly, the resolution makes it much harder for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to use diplomats to advance its prohibited programmes. In the past, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has tried to enable nuclear and ballistic-missile officials to travel by giving them phony diplomatic titles. Meanwhile, Democratic People's Republic of Korea officials posted in embassies abroad have spent their time running businesses and brokering arms sales to fund the regime's military. But an arms dealer with a diplomatic passport is still an arms dealer. So from now on, States must restrict the travel of those affiliated with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear and ballistic-missile programmes or other prohibited activities, diplomatic passports or not.

Thirdly, the resolution imposes unprecedented measures to restrict the flow of illicit materials into the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. On land, the resolution emphasizes that cargo heading into and out of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea by road or rail must be inspected. At sea, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will no longer be allowed to mask its ships and evade scrutiny by flying the flags of other countries or controlling other vessels with their crews. And by air, Member States should inspect the baggage of anyone flying into and out of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In the next 15 days, the Security Council's Democratic People's Republic of Korea Sanctions Committee will make another important determination, publishing for the first time a list of conventional arms dual-use items that will no longer be allowed to enter the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. They are commercially available components that have civilian uses, such as sophisticated electronic sensors, but that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea can use to build advanced military equipment, including radar systems, night vision and stealth technology.

I began by talking about the fact that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea made the choice to pursue nuclear weapons, but, before closing, I would like to discuss another choice that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea regime has made — the choice to systematically violate the human rights of its people. As the United Nations commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea found in its 2014 report (A/HRC/25/63), the Democratic People's Republic of Korea arbitrarily detains between 80,000 and 120,000 political prisoners in its gulags,

where they are subjected to deliberate starvation, forced labour, executions, torture and rape, among other abuses. As the report notes, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea seeks nothing less than total control of organized social life, through tactics ranging from summary executions to forced indoctrinations to the methodical repression of freedom of expression.

Even though we have heard it before — and many of us have repeated it — it is worth underscoring the commission's finding that

> "[t]he gravity, scale and nature of these violations reveal a State that does not have any parallel in the contemporary world." (*A/HRC/25/63, para. 80*)

The situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea reaffirms what we have said elsewhere — when Governments flagrantly violate the human rights of their own people, they almost always show similar disdain for the international norms that help ensure our shared security. For the first time, this resolution enshrines that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea must respect the welfare and inherent dignity of people in its territory. That includes the North Korean people, of course, but also those of other nationalities in its territory, including unjustly detained Americans and those abducted from countries such as Japan and the Republic of Korea, whose families, in some cases, have endured decades of suffering from not knowing the fates of their loved ones.

The defence of human dignity is a basic demand, and it is long overdue coming from the Council. The same clique of leaders responsible for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons is the one responsible for systematically abusing their people at home. For the first time, today's resolution also recalls that, in keeping with Article 5 of the Charter of the United Nations, if the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continues on its current path, systematically and flagrantly violating its Charter obligations, it could see some or all of its rights and privileges here at the United Nations suspended.

The United States is realistic about what today's resolution will achieve. No resolution in New York will likely persuade Pyongyang to cease its relentless pursuit of nuclear weapons tomorrow, but this resolution imposes unprecedented costs on the regime of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for defying the Council's demands. The door remains open for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to choose a different path — a path of negotiations towards complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization. When the Democratic People's Republic of Korea makes that choice, the United States — and I know the Council — will be ready to engage, and with sustained international pressure, it is possible to change the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's calculus. To do that, the members of the Council and all States Members of the United Nations must fully implement the sanctions that we have adopted today. The strength of this resolution and our ability to change the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's threatening, belligerent behaviour depends on Member States exercising maximum vigilance to enforce each and every one of the provisions in today's resolution. We call on all Member States to remain united in imposing consequences on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for its many dangerous choices.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank the Secretary-General for his presence here and for the very strong statement that he made.

Japan welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2321 (2016). We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the United States for taking the lead, and our appreciation also goes to all other members of the Security Council for their support. Japan is pleased to have contributed throughout the process. The fact that this robust resolution was passed unanimously deserves attention. We have attained a great number of sponsoring countries from outside the Security Council as well. Now not only Council members but all States Members of the United Nations share a common responsibility to fully implement the resolution.

Japan, together with the international community, strongly condemns once again the repeated violations of Security Council resolutions by North Korea. We urge North Korea to fully comply with the relevant resolutions, including today's, and to abide by its other international commitments and obligations. Today's resolution does not impose sanctions for the sake of sanctions. It is a tool to correct North Korea's course of action. It is a sincere call from the international community to North Korea, urging it to abandon its nuclear ambitions and return to the negotiating table. We are always ready to resume dialogue if North Korea shows a sincere commitment and takes concrete steps towards denuclearization. In order for North Korea

to change its attitude, we have no other option but to continue to increase pressure.

Resolution 2270 (2016), adopted in March, was already very robust and comprehensive. However, some of the livelihood exemptions for the people of North Korea contained in the resolution have been misused. The resolution adopted today closes such gaps and introduces new additional measures. Drastic coal import limitations, additional sectoral bans to cut revenues and other measures should all have a significant impact on North Korean nuclear and missile development programmes. At the same time, I emphasize that these sanctions are not meant to target ordinary North Korean citizens. It should not be forgotten that North Korea's nuclear and missile development continues at the expense of the welfare of the people of North Korea. It is significant that heightened attention has been paid in today's resolution to the nexus between people's unmet needs and the continuation of nuclear and missile development. We welcome the stronger emphasis on the deplorable humanitarian conditions in North Korea, including the abduction issue, to which Japan attaches utmost importance.

Unfortunately, we have heard some sceptical voices in the process of implementing resolution 2270 (2016), suggesting that nuclear and missile development has not stopped even after the adoption of that resolution, and that resolution 2270 (2016) is not as effective as it should be. I believe that this view confuses cause and effect, and that the degree to which the measures outlined in resolution 2270 (2016) were unsuccessful was in fact the result of those sceptical voices. In other words, international efforts have not kept pace with North Korea's capacity to evade sanctions or its determination to continue nuclear development.

Now is precisely the time for the international community to rigorously implement the resolution we have just adoptedand send the strong, unified message that North Korea cannot afford to continue its current policy. Japan will continue to work very closely with the members of the Council and all States Members of the United Nations to reach a comprehensive solution to the problems related to North Korea.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his strong statement and all the members of the Security Council, particularly the delegations of the United States and China, for their collaboration, which has enabled us to adopt resolution 2321 (2016), establishing an unprecedented sanctions regime for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The two main reasons that Spain was a sponsor of the resolution are, first, for the sake of consistency and out of a sense of responsibility. It was also for reasons of consistency that we supported resolution 2270 (2016), which responded to repeated violations by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Regrettably, however, those violations continued, and on 9 September we witnessed a new nuclear test and the launching of various ballistic missiles. Resolution 2270 (2016) was very clear in its intention to adopt significant additional measures should the Democratic People's Republic of Korea conduct a new nuclear test or missile launch. That did indeed turn out to be the case, and that is why we have been obliged to adopt resolution 2321 (2016) today.

The second reason we sponsored the resolution is our special sense of responsibility owing to the fact that, as we know, Spain is Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006). Because of that, it is our particular duty to ensure the effectiveness, transparency and rigour of resolutions having to do with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Since March, the Committee has worked very hard to implement the sanctions while, I should emphasize, striving not to worsen the humanitarian situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea but only to ensure that those who are responsible for its nuclear programmes to bring them to a halt. I hope that resolution 2321 (2016), which the United States Ambassador has so clearly explained, achieves its aims.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize that Spain and the Security Council have always affirmed the principle that sanctions are not an end in themselves but rather a means for achieving lasting peace and stability, as the Ambassador of Japan made very clear. It is up to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to respect international law and work for its people's prosperity, which is the ultimate goal of today's resolution. In the few weeks remaining until the end of my mandate as Chair of the 1718 Committee, nothing would give me more satisfaction in what I hope is the near future than to see the Committee disappear because the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has begun to comply with its obligations under international law.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation voted in favour of today's resolution 2321 (2016), which sanctions the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for conducting a fifth nuclear test. We should note that while Pyongyang's behaviour ignored the legitimate requests of the international community and therefore required us to adopt tough measures in the form of a standard Council resolution, today's resolution is in no way designed to close off the possibility of reviving the process of negotiations on the nuclear problem on the Korean peninsula and seeking a political solution to the outstanding issues in Asia's North-East.

We want to particularly emphasize that the new resolution should absolutely not be used to stifle North Korea's economy or to worsen the humanitarian situation and the people's circumstances. The situation on the Korean peninsula should not be used as a pretext for increasing the foreign military presence in the region. We firmly condemn any buildup of offensive weapons near the borders that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea shares with neighbours, including the deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense anti-ballistic missile systems. A country cannot possibly achieve lasting long-term security if it tries to build it at the expense of the security of other States. We urge all sides to show restraint, avoid provocative rhetoric and aggravations of the situation and act speedily in seeking a way out of the crisis. On that basis, the Russian Federation is ready to cooperate on the issue with its regional and international partners.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): On 9 September, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea conducted yet another nuclear test, in defiance of the universal objections of the international community. The Government of China is firmly opposed to such acts. The Council's adoption today of resolution 2321 (2016) reflects the international community's united position against the development of nuclear missile programmes by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and in support of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. The resolution reaffirms the importance of safeguarding peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and in North-East Asia, commits to seeking a solution to the issue through peaceful, diplomatic and political means, supports the resumption of the Six-Party Talks and the commitments made in the joint statement of 19 September, and emphasizes the importance of easing tensions on the peninsula for all parties concerned.

As the resolution notes, the sanctions measures are not aimed at worsening the humanitarian situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, harming its people's livelihoods or affecting normal economic and trade activities. China urges the parties concerned to work to effectively implement the resolution's relevant provisions in their entirety. Since the beginning of the year, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has conducted two nuclear tests and multiple ballistic-missile launches. However, certain parties have continued to strengthen their military deployments, increase their military presence and scale up military exercises, and the confrontation on the peninsula has intensified into a vicious circle as a result. That situation must change as soon as possible.

As a near neighbour of the Korean peninsula, China has consistently insisted that it should be denuclearized and its peace and stability upheld. We have always called for the issue to be resolved through dialogue and consultations and have fought against turmoil and conflict. We are opposed to the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense anti-ballistic missile system on the peninsula, as it seriously undermines the strategic security interests of China and other countries of the region and disturbs the regional strategic balance. It is neither conducive to achieving the goal of denuclearizing the Korean peninsula nor helpful to the maintenance of peace and stability there.

China urges the parties concerned to stop forthwith the related deployment process. The current situation on the Korean peninsula is sensitive, complex and dire. All parties must look at the big picture, meet each other halfway and avoid any rhetoric or action that might exacerbate tension. The top priority for the parties concerned is to resume dialogue and negotiations and relaunch the Six-Party Talks as soon as possible in order to work together in a genuine effort to advance the denuclearization process and achieve peace and stability on the Korean peninsula.

China urges the parties concerned to push forward in parallel the negotiations on denuclearization, on one hand, and the replacement of armistice with a peace treaty, on the other. China will persist in advancing dialogue and consultations with a view to solving the problems related to the Korean peninsula within the framework of the Six-Party Talks, thereby playing a

positive and constructive role in achieving enduring peace and stability on the Korean peninsula at an early date.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): I thank the Secretary-General for his strong statement today.

New Zealand welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2321 (2016), which strengthens and expands the sanctions in place against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. This year has seen the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's defiance of the international community and its flouting of international norms reach new heights. As the Secretary-General reminded us, the Council has met many times this year to discuss North Korea's succession of nuclear and ballistic missile tests. These events and the overall trajectory of the situation on the Korean peninsula are sources of great concern and frustration for New Zealand. Given the seriousness of those developments, it is entirely appropriate that the resolution provides for some of the strongest sanctions ever imposed by the Security Council.

New Zealand has co-sponsored the resolution for a number of reasons. Not least of those is our concern at the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's dangerous and provocative behaviour and its ongoing defiance of the Council and of its own international obligations. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's continued provocations pose arguably the most significant threat to the security of New Zealand's region, the Asia-Pacific. New Zealand's support also reflects our commitment to the nuclear non-proliferation regime, to which the actions of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea — the only country to have tested nuclear weapons this century — pose a grave challenge.

We commend the United States and China for their leadership and cooperation in preparing the measures set out in today's resolution. It is now the responsibility of the international community to ensure that the measures in the resolution are fully implemented and effectively enforced. Coordinated and comprehensive implementation by Member States is one of the strongest signals the international community can send to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea that its continued proliferation activities and disregard for international obligations will not be tolerated, and that a change of course is urgently needed.

Ultimately, sanctions are a means, not an end, for effecting change on the Korean peninsula. The resolution sends a further signal to North Korea's leadership that their current path of isolation and defiance of international norms is wrong-headed and that a return in good faith to negotiations on denuclearization provides the best prospects for the security and prosperity of their country and their people. We hope that today's resolution and the strengthened measures that it puts in place can help set us back on the path towards a return to negotiations and ultimately the resolution of this long-standing security challenge.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I thank the Secretary-General for his presence and for his strong position on the issue at hand.

Ukraine welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2321 (2016) and commends the efforts of those delegations that were involved in drafting and submitting the text. We consider the resolution to be a comprehensive and balanced document that, on the one hand, strengthens the existing regime and reinforces it with additional sectoral and targeted sanctions, and, on the other, confirms the Council's openness to dialogue on a peaceful and diplomatic solution to the situation on the Korean peninsula and its intention to avoid affecting the North Korean population.

I would like to stress that the resolution was adopted in response to the fifth and largest nuclear explosive test conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on 9 September, which constituted a blatant violation of its international obligations, including under relevant Security Council resolutions. Ukraine has always been committed to effective multilateral action against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Our collective decision today represents a historic step that clearly demonstrates the Council's consolidated and firm stance to respond decisively to an existing threat to the global non-proliferation regime. Ukraine is honoured to co-sponsor the resolution, which we all hope will contribute to the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

Mrs. Carrión (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the presence of the Secretary-General and appreciate his strong statement.

Uruguay voted in favour of and co-sponsored resolution 2321 (2016). We welcome its unanimous adoption, as we believe that it will be a very useful tool of deterrence in the current situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In that context, Uruguay reiterates its firm condemnation of the nuclear tests, the launch of missiles and the continued provocation of

the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which only escalate tension on the Korean peninsula, constitute a clear violation of international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, and represent a very serious threat to international peace and security.

Uruguay is committed to nuclear disarmament and the non-proliferation regime and reiterates its commitment to and support for the strengthening of multilateralism, universal and complete disarmament and the strengthening of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as a cornerstone of the disarmament and non-proliferation regime. In that framework, Uruguay urges the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to completely, verifiably and irreversibly abandon its existing nuclear programme and to put an end to related activities, including launches of ballistic missiles and other activities that can only be seen as acts of provocation. Similarly, we urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to return to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and to the safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Despite the measures taken in March by the Security Council with the adoption of 2270 (2016), which imposed new, more severe sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, we meet today to adopt new, significant measures due to the fact that the regime of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continues to defy and ignore all of the positions of this Council by pursuing its nuclear and ballistic missile programme with actions that constitute clear violations of the relevant Security Council resolutions. In that respect, we reiterate that Uruguay considers the implementation of sanctions to be a tool of the Council that can be used to achieve a specific end. They should be used not to punish a State, but rather to achieve a political objective.

Uruguay stresses the urgent need to continue to work towards a peaceful, diplomatic and political solution for the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Our country continues to support all initiatives aimed at dialogue, which is why we believe that we must step up our efforts to revive the Six-Party Talks for the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Failing that, the Security Council would find itself in the position of having to continue adopting resolutions and imposing sanctions. We also stress the need for all States to resolutely honour their obligations under the resolution adopted today, as the Security Council's actions cannot be effective in any other way

We would like to point out that Uruguay supports the resolution in the conviction that the implementation of these new sanctions will not directly harm the civilian population, whose human rights and humanitarian concerns are critical.

Mr. Suárez Moreno (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the presence of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon.

Firmly committed to nuclear disarmament and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela voted in favour of resolution 2321 (2016) in response to the nuclear test undertaken on 9 September by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, as we believe that it affects international peace and security, particularly on the Korean peninsula and enhances the risk of possible confrontation. That country's other nuclear tests this year and launch of ballistic missiles violate Security Council resolutions on the issue and the nuclear non-proliferation regime. The resolution adopted today is part of the global focus on mechanisms and formulas to build a sustainable environment conducive to forginh a path towards a political and sustainable solution to the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula.

We call on the Security Council to step up its efforts in promoting dialogue and negotiations between the parties in order to contribute to a negotiated solution of the issue. The sanctions regime applied to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea should be seen as a means and not an end in itself. Its ultimate goal should be aimed at denuclearization, peace and stability in the region through a negotiated political solution. Furthermore, we urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to meet its obligations under the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, and we appeal to all parties to act cautiously so as to avoid heightening tensions that could lead to an armed conflict.

We reiterate that the measures contained in the resolutions adopted on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea should be applied in full respect for the principles of international law, with specific goals, in a responsible, transparent manner and with clear criteria for ending them if the Democratic People's Republic of Korea ends its nuclear programme. At the same time, we must ensure that the measures contained in the resolution do not have a negative humanitarian impact on the civilian population. We are concerned

that the restrictions imposed on the export of primary goods could affect its population.

We also believe that those controls should not serve as a precedent for limiting the rights of States to manage their own natural resources in a sovereign manner to meet their socioeconomic goals, in line with General Assembly resolution 1803 (XVII). The implementation of the measures contained in resolutions 2321 (2016) and 2270 (2016) should in no way impede the coordination of international organizations providing technical and humanitarian assistance to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Those organizations should continue to cooperate in the development of projects and the establishment of conditions conducive to the stability and well-being of the North Korean people.

In conclusion, we reiterate our appeal to Member States with influence on the issue to demonstrate the political will to find a mutually acceptable solution for all parties and to make the necessary efforts to establish a climate of trust that would help to resolve in a peaceful and constructive way the relaunching of the Six-Party Talks, such as the important and unique mechanism to peacefully resolve the intentions and differences on the Korean peninsula.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom strongly supports the unanimous adoption of resolution 2321 (2016). We welcome the leading role played by the United States and China, as well as the statement made this morning by the Secretary-General.

In 2016, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has conducted an unprecedented number of provocations, including two nuclear tests. Today, we have shown that the international community will simply not stand for it. We have sent a clear signal to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea that the Security Council steadfastly opposes the reckless pursuit of nuclear weapons. Today, we redouble our efforts to bring the Democratic People's Republic of Korea back into the fold of law-abiding States. Until we see genuine commitments and actual steps to change course, United Nations sanctions will remain.

We must continue with renewed vigour to limit the activities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea entities involved in the nuclear programme, deter the involvement of any external actors tempted to facilitate such activity, and constrain the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's ability to raise illicit funds. We are acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations for the second time this year with regard to North Korea. That is far from standard practice, but this unique threat deserves nothing less.

Resolution 2270 (2016), adopted in March, marked a substantive increase in pressure on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Since then, ships have been impounded, cargo has been intercepted and bank accounts have been closed. If implemented fully by all Member States in the long term, resolution 2270 (2016) can and will greatly reduce the ability of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to evade sanctions and raise funds. But in the face of Council action, Pyongyang chose to continue on its course of confrontation. As a result, we have taken direct action to build on those landmark sanctions of resolution 2270 (2016). Three concrete steps in the new resolution illustrate our resolve.

First, the mechanism agreed to cap coal exports will directly target a sector used by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to raise foreign currency. Put simply, we have just denied nearly one-quarter of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's foreign income. That is roughly $700 million that from now on cannot be put forward towards the next nuclear test or the next missile launch. This is a powerful message that will be heard loud and clear in Pyongyang. There are direct financial consequences to continued nuclear provocations.

Secondly, the resolution clarifies and further enhances controls agreed in resolution 2270 (2016), including on technology imports, shipping, banking and the abuse by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea of its privileges abroad. Every avenue of illicit activity must be shut down.

Thirdly, the text makes an explicit political statement condemning the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's proliferation choices at the expense of the welfare of its people. Every dollar spent on North Korea's nuclear weapons programme is a dollar that could have been spent on improving the lives of its own citizens, roughly half of whom live in extreme poverty.

The resolution also breaks new ground by calling for an awareness abroad of Democratic People's Republic of Korea labourers being exploited. Sadly, this is a textbook example of modern slavery — something that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea employs both inside and beyond its borders. When implemented fully, these further measures will create

robust new constraints on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's activity. As with all Security Council actions, the resolution is not intended to have adverse humanitarian consequences for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's civilian population, or to affect negatively the work of international organizations or non-governmental organizations carrying out assistance and relief activities in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The United Kingdom has diplomatic relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and will continue to work towards dialogue and a peaceful resolution of this crisis. Diplomacy must continue and be part of the solution. We note that the resolution's provisions, including the provisions on cargo, are consistent with the obligations set out in the Vienna Conventions on diplomatic relations.

Finally, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has a clear choice to make. It can either continue its destabilizing and dangerous behaviour or follow clear steps to begin to rebuild a future for its people. Today, we are united in support for a meaningful change of course.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I would like to express our gratitude to the United States for its efforts in preparing resolution 2321 (2016), adopted today. We thank China for its diplomatic and political efforts aimed at restoring stability and ensuring security on the Korean peninsula, and for its support for the resolution.

The unanimous adoption of resolution 2321 (2016) sends a very strong and firm signal from all members of the Security Council that we will not accept the latest measures adopted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, especially following its fifth nuclear test on 9 September, which represents a violation of the country's commitments under the relevant Security Council resolutions and resolutions of international legality. The test also undermines the non-proliferation regime as a whole.

Resolution 2321 (2016) strengthens sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We welcome the balanced drafting of the resolution, which takes into account the political process and the importance of resuming the Six-Party Talks aimed at denuclearizing the Korean peninsula. The resolution also seeks to avoid exacerbating the humanitarian situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We do not seek to impose sanctions on the people of North Korea or to deprive them of the humanitarian assistance and development projects carried out in their country by the United Nations and its specialized agencies and other donors. Furthermore, the sanctions should not have an adverse effect on the work of embassies in Pyongyang, in accordance with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 and the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations of 1963.

Today, Egypt believes that resolution 2321 (2016) represents a step forward on a path that will not undermine the non-proliferation regime based on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Egypt has always warned against double standards and double criteria when it comes to nuclear non-proliferation and denuclearization in our region. A single country in the Middle East has not yet become a member of the NPT. This is an issue that Egypt and other countries of the Middle East have not accepted and are never going to accept. Today's adoption of resolution 2321 (2016) represents an opportunity to remind the international community and members of the Security Council of that reality, and we urge the Council to shoulder its responsibilities in this regard.

In conclusion, we reaffirm the prominent role played by the Security Council and the importance of its unity and of working constructively within the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006) and its Group of Experts in order to implement the resolutions of the Security Council and to preserve international legality and the Council's authority.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): We join other Council members in expressing appreciation to the delegations of China and the United States as well as to all those involved in the work that led to the adoption of resolution 2321 (2016) today. Malaysia welcomes the unanimous adoption of this very important text, in the light of our belief that the illicit development and procurement of weapons of mass destruction and related technologies and capabilities by any State are unacceptable and cannot be tolerated by the international community. Such activities undermine the work and commitment of all Member States to peaceful relations with each other and to the peaceful resolution of conflict. It is for this reason that Malaysia voted in favour of resolution 2321 (2016).

Malaysia remains convinced that a comprehensive solution, which would take into account the interests

of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the grave hardship its people are facing as well as their humanitarian needs, is indispensable. We call upon the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to return to the negotiating table and resume peaceful dialogue and negotiations within the framework of the Six-Party Talks. The language in the text that safeguards humanitarian exemptions is a crucial element. It is designed to prevent the effects of possible unintended consequences against legitimate interests, particularly those related to the livelihoods and the humanitarian situation of the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We fully support that aspect of the resolution.

As we did upon the adoption of resolution 2270 (2016) in March, Malaysia wishes to re-emphasize that interpretation of relevant provisions in the resolution must not be a pretext for disrupting diplomatic access or further impede the conduct of legitimate diplomatic and humanitarian activities in the country, as stipulated under the Vienna and Geneva Conventions, respectively. At the twenty-third regional forum in July, sponsored by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Malaysia called on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to abide by all relevant Security Council resolutions, dismantle its nuclear programme in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner, and refrain from conducting any provocative acts, in order to maintain peace and stability in the region.

Our aspiration is to see the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. We also wish to see the Democratic People's Republic of Korea returning to the negotiating table and embracing change that builds trust so that shared security and prosperity might be pursued through international cooperation.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary General for his presence today and for his powerful statement. I also thank the United States for submitting resolution 2321 (2016), which we have just adopted unanimously and which France co-sponsored.

After the January nuclear test, the launch of a long-range missile using ballistic technology, and the various ballistic-missile tests conducted this year, North Korea's fifth nuclear test in September served only to strengthen our deep concern over that country's destabilizing provocations. The test demonstrates Pyongyang's stubbornness and represents an irresponsible decision to forge ahead. Let there be no mistake — the determined, methodical and systematic effort of North Korea to develop nuclear and ballistic capabilities is today one of the main threats to regional and international peace and security and an attack on the international non-proliferation regime, making it one of the most important challenges the Security Council has to face and therefore one of its highest priorities.

In that context, France welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2321 (2016). The resolution marks a necessary and decisive step in strengthening sanctions against North Korea and allows us to send a clear and unambiguous message on the unity and determination of the international community to sanction any unacceptable challenge to the non-proliferation regime. Its goal is therefore to lead to a radical policy change in Pyongyang.

The unanimity that the Security Council has shown today is a fine example of its capacity to come together when the essential is at stake. I hope that this unity will be renewed every time issues related to the proliferation or use of weapons of mass destruction should arise. Resolution 2270 (2016), adopted in March, represented a very significant evolution in the sanctions regime. In that same vein, resolution 2321 (2016) allows us now to move one step further in several respects. First, it identifies, clarifies and provides a stricter framework for some of the provisions contained in resolution 2270 (2016). That is the case particularly with regard to the export of coal, the inclusion of new designations and the banning of the transfer of new goods.

The resolution also diversifies the means of action that we have available to us by identifying new tools that allow us to prevent the development of North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, including, for example, new banking and financial measures, new limits on transport modes that the regime is using, and enhanced constraints on the diplomatic means being used by North Korea.

Resolution 2321 (2016) also enables us to enhance our capacity to prevent Pyongyang from funding its nuclear programmes. The extension of sectoral measures, which are synonymous with additional constraints on the regime, illustrates that fact. Through the new resolution, we also condemn the logic being followed by the regime, which involves diverting existing resources to fuel its illegitimate programmes to the detriment of the North Korean people.

Finally, the resolution strengthens the strong message of dissuasion sent to Pyongyang by clearly recalling not only our determination to take additional measures in the event of further provocations, but also that the rights and privileges of membership of a State subject to sanctions do not emerge out of nowhere. The resolution does not close the door to dialogue, because the imposition of sanctions is not our final objective. And yet, as long as those provocations continue, we will have no choice but to enhance them. The determination of France in that regard is adamant. It is now up to North Korea to concretely show, by abandoning its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, that it is ready to fully respect its international obligations.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): We express appreciation for the efforts of China and the United States in drafting resolution 2321 (2016), which we have just adopted.

Angola joined the consensus of the Security Council by voting in favour of resolution 2321 (2016). The text of the resolution is self-explanatory, and the statements by Security Council members have expressed our collective concern about the threat that the nuclear programme of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea poses to international peace and security.

We can only appeal to North Korea to abide by the international community's decisions related to its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes by negotiating the end of those programmes under the agreed framework, concentrating its resources on the social development of its people, meaningfully contributing to the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, and thereby to international peace and security, as well as avoiding becoming an international pariah — a type of development that may become extremely detrimental to the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and an additional danger to peace and security.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Senegal.

In voting unanimously in favour of resolution 2321 (2016), thereby strengthening and expanding the sanctions imposed on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, our Council has shown strong unity in its will to urge the North Korean authorities to give up their nuclear and military programme, which violates the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, as well as the non-proliferation regime.

That very strong and unanimous message was possible thanks to the United States delegation, our facilitator, which cooperated closely with the Chinese delegation. We hope that the additional measures of resolution 2321 (2016) will lead the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to fully cooperate with the Security Council, and thereby allow for the resumption of negotiations within the framework of the Six-Party Talks, so as to denuclearize and stabilize the Korean peninsula.

We have said on many occasions that sanctions are a means and not an end. With the objective of paving the way for a political process, the humanitarian aspect of the new measures is quite telling. The complexity and scope of the measures specified in the resolution will require, as was indicated by the Secretary-General, technical assistance, as well as capacity-building, in order to make it possible for Member States of the United Nations, and the international community as a whole, to implement them effectively. It will also be a test of the determination and will of the Security Council.

As we are talking about non-proliferation, my delegation would like to take this opportunity to reiterate Senegal's commitment to full respect by all for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Echoing the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Egypt, I call for the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones throughout the world, including in the Middle East. To conclude, Senegal calls for total nuclear disarmament.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Oh Joon (Republic of Korea): I would first like to express my appreciation to you, Mr. President, and the Senegalese presidency for convening today's meeting, and for inviting my delegation to participate in this meeting.

The Republic of Korea welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2321 (2016). I thank Ambassador Samantha Power and the United States delegation for taking the initiative for the resolution, as well as other members of the Council for supporting it.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear-weapons programme, with its latest nuclear

test — its fifth — has become the most serious threat to the global non-proliferation regime. It poses unprecedented challenges to the authority of the Security Council. The programme seems to be nearing the final stage of weaponization, and Pyongyang makes no secret of its intention to acquire and use a nuclear arsenal. That is totally outrageous.

By adopting the resolution today, the international community has once again made it clear that we will never tolerate the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). My delegation supports the new resolution's introduction of robust measures that complement and reinforce the existing sanctions regime. When implemented, they will significantly restrain the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's ability to carry on with its WMD programmes by targeting the flow of hard currency, materials, equipment and technology that they require.

This year alone, it is estimated that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has spent more than $200 million on nuclear tests and missile launches. It is also estimated that the total cost so far for their nuclear programme must have surpassed $1 billion. That money could have been used to buy one year's worth of food for the entire North Korean population. People need to eat food, not weapons. For reasons defying any common sense, Pyongyang is paying a heavy price to gain a nuclear arsenal, at the expense of its own people. If it had used those resources to benefit people's livelihoods, the North Korean population's hardship would have been much relieved.

In that vein, my delegation welcomes the fact the resolution 2321 (2016) takes a more holistic approach by addressing the North Korean people's welfare and dignity, as shown in paragraph 45, which has been included in a sanctions resolution on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for the first time. We hope that the resolution and the continuing discussion on human rights will contribute to helping our brothers and sisters in the north in their quest for a better life and human dignity.

For me personally, this is my last time participating in a United Nations meeting, as I have completed my term here and am flying out tonight. I am relieved because the resolution has been adopted before my departure, but I am also sorry that I am leaving without seeing the issue being resolved. The North Korean nuclear issue is multifaceted. It is an issue of nuclear non-proliferation that poses the question of whether or not we will be able to maintain the global nuclear non-proliferation regime that we have had for the past half century. We will have to consider whether we will be able to stand up to the challenge posed to the regime or whether we will be able to stop it or let it go. We have a very serious question before us.

It is also an issue of international security. In our region, when North Korea acquired nuclear capabilities, it had the effect of breaking the status quo in terms of our strategy balance. Thus, the other countries of the region have to consider how to restore the balance. It is a serious question to be considered whether other countries should try to match the capabilities or come up with other ways to restore the strategy balance in the region. For South Koreans, it is a question of soul-searching as well — soul-searching about our national identity, national division and national desire for unification. Korea's national division should not become a national curse. When we watch North Korea's missile launches on television, we feel as if a brother in the family is wielding a gun and shooting in the air while his children are screaming out of hunger and fear.

All in all, I believe that what we are doing here — applying pressure on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea through non-military sanctions measures — is the right thing to do, and I believe and I hope that those measures will eventually work. They will work for the non-proliferation regime, international security and the two Koreas so that we can eventually get over the issue and go back to dialogue and cooperation.

I would like to thank you, Sir, all the members of the Security Council and the Secretariat for the cooperation and assistance rendered to me during the past three years.

The President (*spoke in French*): I wish the representative of the Republic of Korea a safe return to his country.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7822

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7822nd meeting

Wednesday, 30 November 2016, 11.30 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Seck	(Senegal)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-40719 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 11.30 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; and Mr. Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

Mr. De Mistura is joining today's meeting via video teleconference from Geneva; Mr. O'Brien is joining today's meeting via video teleconference from London; and Mr. Cappelaere is joining today's meeting via videoteleconference from Amman.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura (*spoke in French*): I thank you very much, Mr. President, for this opportunity.

(*spoke in English*)

As members are aware, I will be briefing the Council in a few days, on 8 December. On that occasion, I will be able to elaborate more on the overall political process in Syria, which needs to maintain its momentum because, as we have always said, we cannot simply let the facts on the ground take place; we also need to constantly maintain a political momentum.

Today, however, let us focus on the immediate crisis in Aleppo. As the Council is aware and as has already been indicated, my colleague from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien, and my colleague UNICEF Regional Director Geert Cappelaere will elaborate further on the humanitarian tragedy and the United Nations response, particularly and specifically with respect to Aleppo. So, on my side, at least at this stage, I am of course available for questions on a few points, because the real floor belongs to those who are handling and want to handle the humanitarian aspect.

Over the past two weeks, both ground and air assaults on eastern Aleppo and also, frankly, attacks on western Aleppo have intensified, culminating in the capture last weekend by Government forces of several districts in the northern part of eastern Aleppo, thereby de facto splitting the largest opposition-held urban stronghold into two sides. It is estimated that almost 40 per cent of the area previously held by armed opposition groups is now in the hands of Government forces.

Over the past few days, thousands of civilians have fled from eastern Aleppo neighbourhoods to other parts of the city, and initial reports indicated that up to 16,000 people are being displaced; in fact, the figure is growing by the hour, as the Council will be hearing from Stephen O'Brien. It is likely that thousands more will flee should the fighting continue to spread and further intensify over the coming days. I have therefore strongly suggested — and I have been informed that that has now been agreed upon by the Government — that Ali Al-Za'tari, our Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Coordinator in Damascus, together with as many members as possible of the United Nations international country team, should go to Aleppo as soon as possible in order to rejoin our many colleagues who are nationals and have already started to work from within the country team in order to assist the Syrian civilian population in Aleppo, both eastern and western.

Violence in Aleppo is not one-sided, let us be frank. Even if attacks on western Aleppo are not on the same scale, we have recently seen attacks from eastern Aleppo on residential quarters there, including the shelling of a school on 20 November in which reportedly 10 children died and many more were injured. Yesterday Stephen O'Brien — we were together in Brussels — reported that up to 25,000 people had been displaced in western Aleppo over the past few weeks. The Council will hear further updates again; as can be seen, the figure is increasing.

Even as we focus on Aleppo today, we should remember that the war continues in Idlib, Hama, Al-Waer, Homs, north of Latakia, western Ghouta, north-western Damascus and eastern Ghouta. Each of those areas deserves a separate description, but the

underlying theme remains the same: the continued dominance of a military over a political strategy, and the brutal price paid by civilians in that process.

Tens of thousands still remain in opposition-controlled areas in Aleppo, and they are living under constant threat resulting from the ongoing fighting. Others are at risk while attempting to flee the fighting, adding to the dangers associated with attempting to flee across an active front line. We have received reliable reports indicating that, in many cases, opposition groups have been actually preventing civilians from leaving areas under their control. We are also concerned that, upon reaching Government-controlled areas or those controlled by the Syrian defence forces, civilians perceived to have lived in opposition-controlled areas or to have connections with armed opposition groups may have been detained. Tens of thousands of civilians on all sides are therefore in need of aid.

The United Nations should be able to access those in need, wherever they are, by all means or routes possible, and without preconditions. In short, aid needs to be delivered to those inside and outside Aleppo, and those who have left must be protected from retribution. Our line will unavoidably be — as it has always been the case in the past in other difficult situations — that the United Nations and its partners should be allowed and should be ready to reach all sides of eastern Aleppo with urgent humanitarian aid. That is the principle. If, subsequently, implementing that measure is not immediately possible in a comprehensive and effective manner, the United Nations should nevertheless not hesitate to try to help all those whom it can reach today, in view of the current circumstances. The priority is reaching people, those we have been concerned and worried about and who have been isolated from humanitarian aid since June.

When I met Foreign Minister Al-Moualem in Damascus on 20 November, I addressed the issue of aerial attacks on hospitals in eastern Aleppo, which the Secretary-General himself condemned on the same day. I publicly suggested that a verification mission be sent to eastern and western Aleppo to assess damage on the hospitals, which is also a suggestion that, I think, our Humanitarian Coordinator in Damascus has been making. I reiterate that call in the Council today.

You will recall, Mr. President, that last month, since there were no other plans going forward that could stop the violence from continuing, I proposed a political initiative for Aleppo, not really a humanitarian one, but a comprehensive one that is separate from humanitarian proposals. It requires an end to the violence, the departure of Al-Nusra Front fighters from eastern Aleppo and the preservation of the local administration — not a separation, not an autonomy, not a new type of administration, but the preservation of the local administration. That would be guaranteed by those with the power to give such a guarantee. That proposal, in one form or another, has actually been discussed now for at least six weeks in Lausanne in follow-up meetings of some of the participants of the original Lausanne meeting and in other discussions.

I myself have continued to push those ideas, including most recently during my visit to Damascus and through contacts with the opposition and armed opposition groups. That proposal is still on the table, and is particularly applicable to that part of eastern Aleppo that is still under the control of the armed opposition with a clear presence of Al-Nusra in it. While the situation on the ground is fast evolving, that proposal has become less obviously applicable immediately, but a part of it, the departure of Al-Nusra, the actual stopping of the bombing, the humanitarian access and the preservation — I repeat — of the local administration is still on the table.

I am convinced that helping to ensure the departure of those fighters whom the Council considers to be terrorists, the Al-Nusra, and who to this day remain in parts of eastern Aleppo still controlled by the opposition, should be and could be an outcome around which everyone in Syria and the international community could still agree. I therefore urge concerned stakeholders not to lose their focus on that practical initiative, which is still valid, particularly at this very delicate moment when the forecast could be that the fighting in eastern Aleppo may continue for weeks with a lot of collateral, tragic effects. That may also spare innocent civilian lives and ensure the separation of terrorist elements from other armed groups.

As I said, I will be brief, and as I said, there is plenty of evidence that the military logic is currently prevailing on both sides. The Council, on behalf of the international community, should call on all belligerents and their sponsors to ensure full respect for international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians in Aleppo. But make no mistake about the fact that none of the military developments that we are witnessing point to what one could call a stable ongoing,

permanent military solution. Indeed, any sustainable solution to the Syrian tragedy, when it comes, will have to include a formula for the stability of the country in order to ensure the non-recurrence of the terrorist threat and the return to what could be a stable Syria. It is my strong conviction that such a formula cannot be brought about without a negotiated political settlement to the crisis, one that involves a mechanism for sharing power and implementing the agenda set forth in Council resolution 2254 (2015). I look forward, therefore, to briefing Council members in person next week, on 8 December, in order to speak in further detail of the options that may and should exist in order to continue pushing towards the attainment of a political process.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: I am joining the Security Council from the offices of the International Maritime Organization in London, and I would like to thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his briefing, whose contents coincide with those contained in our presentation to the European Parliament yesterday.

For over five years now, the United Nations and the entire humanitarian community have raised the alarm about the devastating impact of the conflict in Syria on millions of ordinary men, women and children. We have pleaded that the Security Council and the international community come together to ensure that both civilians and civilian infrastructure are protected in accordance with basic humanitarian and international obligations, that access be granted to provide lifesaving humanitarian assistance and that all efforts be made to reach a political solution to the conflict. Our calls, and the requests, even the demands, of the Council have largely gone ignored.

The parties to the conflict in Syria have shown, time and again, that they are willing to take any action or do any deed to secure military advantage, even if it means killing, maiming or besieging civilians into submission in the process. There are no limits or red lines left to cross. The rules of war — sacrosanct notions born out of generations of costly and painful lessons and established more than 150 years ago, in 1864 to be precise, in the First Geneva Convention — have been systematically disregarded in Syria.

Nowhere has the cruelty of this war been more grimly witnessed than in Aleppo. Aleppo, one of the world's oldest continually inhabited cities and Syria's manufacturing capital, has been recklessly destroyed over the course of the past five years. We have all seen the harrowing images of bombs and mortars raining down in recent days, weeks and months on civilian areas, residential houses, schools, medical facilities, water and electric stations, and public markets. There are constant, tormenting images of people murdered, bloody, and exhausted. There is constant bombing and shelling in plain sight, occurring night and day — day in and day out. The noose of the siege has tightened, and those civilians trapped are in desperate conditions. Those attacks have not been limited to eastern Aleppo but have also killed and injured civilians in western Aleppo and damaged civilian infrastructure. As the Council has heard me say before, Aleppo has become the apex of what has become a catalogue of horrors in Syria. Its people have been living in a long terrifying nightmare-reality that no human being should have to endure.

The intensity of attacks on eastern Aleppo neighbourhoods over the past few days has forced thousands of civilians to flee to other parts of the city. In the past four days, numerous civilians have reportedly been killed. Just today, we received a report that scores of people were killed in a single air strike this morning. It is estimated that up to 25,000 people have been displaced from their homes in eastern Aleppo since Saturday. That is the estimate that Staffan de Mistura has just given, and I do not have any further information other than that which were able to get at approximately the same time yesterday. We will keep the Council updated. That number includes approximately 13,500 people 60 to 70 per cent of whom are women and children in a collective centre and cotton factory in Jibreen, a Government-held area to the east of eastern Aleppo city; 500 with family members in western Aleppo; 8,500 in collective shelters in Sheikh Maqsoud, a Kurdish enclave north of eastern Aleppo city; as well as tens of thousands displaced within eastern Aleppo itself.

As the fighting continues unabated, the situation is fluid and those statistics are indeed changing by the hour and the day. It is likely that thousands more will flee should fighting further spread and intensify over the coming days. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and local humanitarian partners supported

by the United Nations are responding to the needs of internally displaced families in Jibreen, Sheikh Maqsoud and elsewhere. That includes preparing hot meals and bread to families, ensuring medical assistance to the sick and injured, providing potable water and distributing sanitation and hygiene kits, and other basic relief items such as blankets and mattresses.

The United Nations has prepositioned stocks to support the response including non-food items for 45,000 people; water, sanitation, hygiene and nutrition supplies for 80,000 people; and food for 150,000 people. Those stocks can be replenished within 48 hours from the United Nations hub in Homs and elsewhere as necessary. It is therefore absolutely vital that the Government of Syria enable us to deploy in safety and without undue restrictions all essential international and national staff to Aleppo to increase our capacity to respond effectively to those growing needs and address protection concerns for civilians.

We must recognize that, even though some people have been able to flee the fighting, many have gone from one terrifying situation to what they consider to be another. Aside from the dangers associated with attempting to flee across active front lines, we have received reports that non-State armed groups are preventing civilians from leaving areas under their control. There are also deep protection concerns that upon reaching Government-controlled areas, civilians perceived to have links or connections with non-State armed groups, including humanitarian workers, potentially face arbitrary arrests, detention or worse. Trapped in Aleppo are also dozens of humanitarian staff who have heroically assisted civilians and are now also losing their lives. According to the World Health Organization, three members of the health staff were killed adding to the many other Syrian doctors, health workers and civilians.

As we have seen before, across Syria and throughout the conflict, men, women and children have been routinely arrested at Government-controlled checkpoints before being transferred to one of dozens of official or secret Government-run detention facilities. They are often held incommunicado and indefinitely while facing the risk of being subjected to torture and ill-treatment, extrajudicial killings or being disappeared.

I call on all parties to the conflict to adhere to and respect international humanitarian law. I remind all parties to the conflict that civilians and those hors de combat must be respected and protected at all times. Any evacuation of civilians must be safe, voluntary, and to a place of their choosing. Parties must allow humanitarian organizations safe and unimpeded access to bring life-saving help to those displaced and identify and respond to protection threats. And finally, it is imperative that all those displaced are allowed to return voluntarily and in safety and dignity to their homes as soon as the situation allows.

I am extremely concerned about the fate of the remaining civilians in the besieged areas of eastern Aleppo city. These people have been besieged for nearly 150 days now and most, simply, do not have the means to survive for much longer. Intensified fighting and aerial bombardment continues to occur resulting in civilian casualties and injuries. As of today, as a result of the bombardment and shelling, all hospitals have been directly hit several times, and there is no properly functioning hospital in eastern Aleppo city except for one trauma unit. All other primary medical facilities are operating at minimum capacity and do not have trauma-treatment capabilities, leaving most wounded civilians unable to get the most basic treatment. With few, if any, ambulances available, we are receiving reports of wounded civilians being rushed to medical facilities on vegetable carriages. Access to clean water is scarce. People have resorted to scavenging as United Nations humanitarian food stocks have been exhausted while prices of scarce basic food and fuel supplies have dramatically risen to levels that most remaining civilians are unable to afford. People are trapped and terrified. They are running out of time.

Just as we are ready to respond to all those displaced, the United Nations and its partners also remain ready to provide immediate assistance and medical evacuations for civilians inside besieged parts of eastern Aleppo in line with the United Nations humanitarian four-point plan that we have been seeking to implement since early November. Furthermore, truckloads of humanitarian supplies stand ready to deliver humanitarian assistance to eastern Aleppo from Turkey and western Aleppo. For the sake of humanity, we call on and plead with the parties and those with influence to do everything in their power to protect civilians and enable access to the besieged part of eastern Aleppo before it becomes one giant graveyard.

Indiscriminate shelling also hits civilian-populated areas of western Aleppo, killing and injuring civilians. Civilian infrastructure, including schools and medical

facilities, has also been destroyed, as I reported to the Council last week (see S/PV.7817). Since July, approximately 70,000 people have been displaced within western Aleppo as a result of fighting and indiscriminate shelling. Overall, the United Nations estimates that up to 400,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) now live in western Aleppo. The United Nations, SARC and partners continue to respond to the needs of pre-existing IDPs in western Aleppo, as well as the wave of new displacement from eastern Aleppo in recent days.

While the world is watching events in Aleppo, another 700,000 people are in other besieged areas across the country, mostly in rural Damascus surrounded by Government forces. As winter approaches, they are trapped and petrified, and as they watch the chilling events in Aleppo unfold, they are asking: Will I be next? It may be too late for many of the people of eastern Aleppo, but surely the Council can come together, stop the brutality and also prevent that a similar fate does not befall other Syrians. What they and we need to see above all is three things: first, real respect and protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure; secondly, safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access; and thirdly, an end to brutal sieges for once and for all.

These are neither new nor complicated demands, but common threads of humankind that we all have a responsibility to rally around. And those parties that cannot or will not live up to their basic obligations should know that they will one day be held accountable for their actions. I should add that in all my points of advocacy for the suffering people caught up in this crisis, the overwhelming question that comes to me from politicians, the affected people and journalists is: "Why on Earth can the Security Council not come together and unite to put a stop to this suffering?"

The people of Syria have suffered far too much and for far too long. United Nations humanitarian agencies, SARC and our non-governmental organization partners are doing everything they can to meet those needs. But, as we have repeatedly said, the solution to this crisis does not rest with us. More than anything, I urge all Council members for a political solution so that we can give some semblance of hope to the many millions of Syrian families who will in fact fail to be able to go to sleep tonight, but they will be hungry and they will be sick and they will be fearing for their lives.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Cappelaere.

Mr. Cappelaere: I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Security Council today on the plight of children in Syria. To say that their situation is tragic would be an understatement. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine what words could still adequately convey the unspeakable horrors endured by Syria's children every day. Tens of thousands of children have already been killed. Millions have been uprooted from their homes, some more than once. Too many have been deprived of basic medical care and safe drinking water. Too many have witnessed the deaths of their loved ones and the destruction of the places they once thought are safe: their homes, their schools, their playgrounds and their hospitals. Simply put, Syria's children are trapped in a living nightmare. We must ask ourselves: What is left of childhood for the boys and girls of Syria?

We have just heard from my colleague, Mr. Stephen O'Brien, about how devastating the past few days have been for the people of Aleppo. As we consider the events unfolding there, I would like us all to pause for a moment and imagine life through the eyes of a child who is trapped in that tragic situation. As a boy or girl in Aleppo today, where do you find comfort and hope amid the bombs? Determined to learn, you attend school whenever your parents allow you to leave the house, but you do not know any more if you will ever come back. It is hard for you as a child to focus because it is cold and you do not sleep well, haunted by nightmares and hunger. Children are wondering why this is happening. Children are wondering why no one is doing more to make this stop.

Amir, a five-year-old boy, is one of those children. Our team met him in Aleppo very recently. He and his sister were playing outside when their house was shelled. His sister was injured in the face and eye, while Amir sustained severe burns all over his body. He had to undergo two painful surgeries to replace the burned skin in one of the very few remaining health facilities in Aleppo. Harsh as it may sound, Amir was lucky. Too many children today are not as lucky.

In western Aleppo, we met a father living with the trauma and deep regret of simply letting his eight and ten-year-old daughters go to school. They left their makeshift home one morning with their schoolbags on their back. Only their lifeless bodies returned after a

shell slammed into their classroom. UNICEF colleagues could barely look into the eyes of the father suffering so much pain.

As the Council heard last week, the health system in eastern Aleppo is crumbling. Doctors on the ground told UNICEF that children with poor chances of survival are often simply left to die due to limited capacity and supplies.

The violence must stop. Nothing justifies the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians, especially children. Parties to the conflict must protect civilians, not least children, and allow immediate access for humanitarian agencies to provide life-saving assistance. UNICEF, together with its partners, have been standing and continue to stand ready to respond immediately as soon as a humanitarian pause is agreed.

Beyond the grim situation in Aleppo, we estimate that some 6 million children inside Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance. Over 2 million of these children are living in hard-to-reach areas, which humanitarian agencies cannot access on a regular basis. Nearly half a million children live under siege, cut off from humanitarian aid and basic services for months at a time. Some of these children have been living under siege for two years. UNICEF and partners strive on a daily basis to deliver timely and quality assistance to the most vulnerable children throughout Syria. Allow me to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all humanitarians working courageously on the front lines for Syrian children.

When we have access, we can achieve a great deal. During the month of October alone, UNICEF and its partners reached 2.9 million Syrians with urgently needed assistance, including nearly 350,000 in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. Since January, over 3 million children under five have been vaccinated through polio campaigns. Back-to-learning supplies have reached nearly 3 million children. Urgent maintenance to water and sanitation systems have allowed millions to access safe water. And essential nutrition supplies have reached nearly 300,000 children in besieged and hard-to-reach areas through inter-agency convoys. Working together with our partners, we can and have made life just a little more bearable for Syrian children. Sadly, however, we often fail — not due to a lack of commitment or a lack of readiness. As those children wait for us, they wonder why.

Schools have come under relentless attack all over the country. This year has been particularly devastating for education. Since the beginning of 2016, the United Nations has documented 84 attacks on schools across Syria, with at least 69 children losing their lives and many more injured. Across the country, more than 7,000 schools can no longer be used because they are either destroyed, damaged, are sheltering displaced families or are being used for military purposes. Today, 1.7 million children in Syria are out of school.

In the worst areas, safe water is either scarce or too costly. In collective shelters or households hosting displaced families, toilets have to be shared by dozens of people and sanitary conditions are extremely poor. Only one-third of Syria's sewage is now being treated. The violence has destroyed water infrastructure and, in some cases, parties to the conflict have deliberately cut off water supplies as a war tactic. Earlier this year, UNICEF reported that water in Aleppo was shut off for 48 days.

Since the beginning of the conflict, families all over Syria have been reporting grave violations against their children — committed by all parties. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict has briefed the Council on a regular basis regarding those violations. The United Nations verified 1,500 grave violations in 2015 alone, including killing, maiming, the recruitment and use of children by parties to the conflict, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access. Harrowing as these numbers are, they represent only verified cases. Imagine how many more remain unreported or unconfirmed.

As the violence continues to intensify in Aleppo, children will continue to pay a heavy price. These children ask why their loved ones have died. Mothers and fathers in Aleppo feel helpless as they struggle to feed their children while the prices of food and other commodities have almost doubled, putting children at serious risk of malnutrition. Violence, displacement and roadblocks mean that many children can no longer access life-saving health care. Every checkpoint crossed presents a set of dangers for children: the risk of being exploited, the risk of being recruited or the risk of simply getting caught in the crossfire.

We have all seen the images — brave men and women pulling babies' bodies out from under the rubble; babies taken out of incubators because of attacks on

hospitals; little boys and girls, many injured, pleading for help or dead. Yesterday, many of us saw the girl in the pink coat, standing shocked, terrified and confused amidst the shelling — searching for her father, whom she lost in the chaos of havoc and violence. Children ask us why; we ask why.

This devastating downward spiral must end. Today, every Syrian child under the age of five has known nothing but a lifetime shaped by war. Until recently, over 90 per cent of them attended school, nearly all children were regularly vaccinated and malnutrition was almost non-existent. Syria was among the first Arab countries to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The protection of children should be, at all times, a primary consideration for all of us. We have failed them over the past six years and we continue to fail the children in Syria. Our failure is not only jeopardizing children's lives, but the future of the country, the region and the whole world.

UNICEF and its partners will continue to do everything we can to provide assistance to children and their families in Syria, wherever they may reside. In that connection, I take this opportunity to thank the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien, for their tireless support and determination to help us reach those children in need.

Let us be clear — as long as the violence continues, children in Syria will continue to suffer. UNICEF renews its call on all parties to lift the sieges across Syria, and to allow and facilitate immediate, unconditional and sustained humanitarian access to all areas of the country. We call upon the parties to uphold their obligations to protect children. These are their children and their future. They are in their hands. Until the guns are silenced and remain silent, children in Syria will continue to ask us why.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Cappelaere for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Council.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): What will it take? Syria is in the midst of a horrific conflict and the worst is probably yet to come. The United Kingdom and France have called this emergency session because eastern Aleppo and other besieged areas are today facing new depths of crisis, as the three briefers have so clearly described. History may show that it is, perhaps, the most horrific conflict of our lifetimes.

We have faced horror before. We and those who have sat in these very chairs before us have collectively adopted 2,321 resolutions — 2,321 decrees from the world's highest authority on international peace and security. We have sent peacekeepers to war zones. We have stemmed conflict. We have defied great odds, bridged divides and have answered the call of humankind for seven consecutive decades. And yet on Syria, sitting here in the Chamber today, after over five years of fighting and the deaths of close to half of a million people, after the displacement of 11 million people from their homes, with 1 million more under siege, the Security Council has completely failed to act. Stephen O'Brien asks why; the answer is simple. Time and again, Russia has vetoed to prevent the Security Council from finding the unity necessary for ending the war. Therefore again I ask, what will it take?

I have met members of Syrian civil society. I have met impartial aid groups, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières. I have met doctors who have treated the wounded in makeshift hospitals in Aleppo, and they tell me what is expected: the bombs are directly responsible for the greatest number of deaths. To stop the deaths, stop the bombing. But those numbers are simply the deaths that we can count today. As difficult as it is to imagine, there is even more horror looming under the surface — horror that could be on an even larger scale; an agonizingly slow and painful death.

That is what the United Nations is talking about when it briefs us on the status of besieged areas in Syria. Sieges are now a routine item of discussion when the Council discusses Syria. We cannot begin to think that sieges are now common, that they are somehow a simple matter of fact. They maybe a regular part of the conflict in Syria but they are anything but regular. What they are a deliberate act of starvation and withholding of medical care. The Syrian regime and Russia have been executing a plan that has now laid 1 million people under siege. And "executing" is an all-too-appropriate word because without a change in policy and a change of heart, that is exactly what it is — the slow, painful, bitter execution of 1 million Syrians cut off from aid convoys and the world.

The United Nations has an aid plan. It is not an opposition plan. It is not designed to aid one side over the other. Its sole purpose is to save lives and alleviate suffering. As Stephen said, the aid convoys are ready to roll, but they must have permission from the regime — permission that has been systematically denied. This is the United Nations — the impartial body the world looks to in the bleakest of situations. Russia is a leading member of the United Nations and crucial to the eventual solution of the Syria conflict. Why, then, can Russia and the Syrian regime not sign up to the United Nations aid plan?

First they said it was because of terrorism. Then we reminded them that 100,000 children could not be terrorists. Then they said that it was because of the opposition. The opposition has now agreed to the United Nations plan for eastern Aleppo. What is today's excuse? What is the excuse for employing the medieval tactic of siege? What is the excuse for the continued bombardment — dropping bombs at a disturbing rate over the homes of children and families? What is the excuse for the continued endorsement of war crimes? The ancient city of Aleppo as we know it is on the verge of being wiped from the face of the Earth. Today we speak of reaching those who remain, tomorrow there may not be an Aleppo to reach. If that comes to pass, the excuses of the Syrian regime and of Russia will have played a substantial role. Let me be absolutely clear about what needs to happen in Aleppo.

First, there needs to be an immediate ceasefire in order to give civilians respite from the bombs and to allow humanitarian access. Secondly, like the armed opposition groups have done, Russia and the regime must agree to cooperate on the United Nations four-point humanitarian plan. Thirdly, those civilians who want to leave the city must be allowed to do so safely to areas of their choosing, with protection assured by impartial monitoring. We are receiving reports today of the Syrian regime bombing Syrian families who are fleeing Aleppo on foot with their belongings. I call on Russia and the regime to commit to the Council today that no civilians will be attacked as they leave Aleppo. The deliberate targeting of civilians in such circumstances would be a war crime and we will hold those responsible to account.

Words cannot describe what is currently happening in Aleppo. We have heard talk of a circle of hell, a kill zone, a giant graveyard. Within that kill zone — that circle of hell — are 100,000 children. We have all been discussing it long enough. We have seen the headlines, the images and the videos. Think back to the last face of a Syrian civilian you saw. The gruesome fact is that too many of them are destined to become a statistic — and maybe they already are — another number in the death toll, another figure in a United Nations situation report of people starving in Aleppo, another statistic in a headline that reads "Seven children dead in school bombing". We made a habit of allowing those statistics to be created, and we must break that habit.

Egypt, New Zealand and Spain have drafted a very reasonable draft resolution calling for 10-day ceasefire to stop the bombing and let aid in. There should be a vote on that draft resolution as soon as possible. If not today, then I call on the Council to meet again before the end of this week to review the situation in Aleppo and for us to move swiftly to adopt that draft resolution to deliver a ceasefire and the full implementation of the United Nations humanitarian plan.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Senegalese presidency for having convened today's emergency Security Council meeting on the situation in Aleppo at the request of France and the United Kingdom. I would also like to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura; the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Relief Coordinator, Mr. Stephen O'Brien; and UNICEF's Geert Cappelaere for their briefings.

On 15 November, the Al-Assad regime and its supporters launched another ground offensive on Aleppo, which intensified on 26 November. That major ground and air offensive led to the taking of half of the area under the control of the opposition. The toll stands at at least 225 civilian deaths, including 27 children. More than 20,000 people were displaced because of the fighting and more than 200,000 remain under siege. As has been said, the humanitarian situation is simply tragic. The areas that remain under opposition control no longer have operational health infrastructure. Hospitals in eastern Aleppo have been repeatedly bombed without respite. United Nations emergency food reserves have been exhausted for more than 10 days now and access to drinking water is insufficient to meet the needs of the entire population. The ancient city of Aleppo, in which many of the greatest civilizations flourished, is collapsing before our very eyes.

Each of us is aware of the extreme cynicism and brutality that characterizes the Syrian regime's current

offensive in Aleppo, which is a strategy of total warfare. The regime does not hide its objectives. But even war has rules, established, inter alia, by the Geneva Conventions, which apply everywhere and at all times. Those rules embody respect for international humanitarian law, and in particular the protection of civilian populations, by banning belligerents from deliberately targeting areas in which humanitarian workers and civilians are present, carrying out indiscriminate attacks against them, hampering humanitarian assistance and medical evacuations and using famine as a weapon of war. Those basic legal and moral principles have been persistently flouted by the regime and its backers, who have shown themselves prepared to do anything to regain control of the city and break the insurgents' resistance. The civilian population of eastern Aleppo is not even a factor in this implacable, unrelenting equation. Eastern Aleppo is a victim twice over, of constant shelling and a siege that is medieval in its ferocity. In their targeting of civilians, including hospitals and medical personnel, they both constitute war crimes.

During the past week France has continued to hammer home the same message, demanding that the regime and its backers end the offensive and all their indiscriminate attacks and finally allow humanitarian aid access to the people of eastern Aleppo as soon as possible. The priority is providing assistance and protection to the civilian population, whether they wish to leave or stay. Those who want to leave should be able to do so and should be able to choose which direction they wish to take. At the moment they are rightly terrified by the strikes that are killing those who try to flee, the massacres of those who enter areas controlled by the regime and the camps they have been dumped in.

Today we have seen that the Council has once again been unable to agree on a path for saving the people of eastern Aleppo. Every initiative in the Council aimed at saving them — the draft resolution proposed by France and Spain, that of New Zealand and, finally, the humanitarian penholders' initiative — has come up against the same rejection, by Russia. That is why France is once again asking those Council members who are involved in the conflict and have influence on the regime — Russia in particular — to bring all their efforts to bear to interrupt the current spiral, whose legacy will be a devastated country condemned to decades of instability, violence and terrorism. We should emphasize that the current policy of total war is also a strategic error.

Let us not deceive ourselves, the painful tragedy of Aleppo does not represent the road that should be taken if Syria is to ultimately be stabilized in a viable, reconstituted form. No, the tragedy of Aleppo represents yet another stage in Syria's descent into the abyss, at the bottom of which lie its children, blown to bits by bombs or disfigured by hunger, and with the potential for a never-ending conflict of which terrorists will of course be the greatest beneficiaries. The tragedy of Aleppo automatically fuels radicalization and, as a consequence, terrorism. It simply presents the terrorists with a gift of blood and bullets. Sadly, the comparison between eastern Aleppo today and Guernica during the Spanish Civil War is an apt one. Aleppo is at once a vast humanitarian tragedy — the epicentre of the worst such tragedy since the twenty-first century began — a black hole that swallows and destroys every value that the United Nations upholds, and, ultimately, a harbinger of terrible tragedies to come.

For France, which like others has been a victim of terrorism and is still exposed to its threat, Aleppo lies at the core of a challenge that goes to the heart not just of our values but also of our interests, including our security interests. The humanitarian tragedy and the terrorist threat in Aleppo — the horror and the terror — are two sides of the same coin. On behalf of France, I would therefore like to emphasize once again how utterly urgent it is that we end the bombing and the war, protect the civilians and work together to find ways to reach a political settlement, because that is the only possible way out of this conflict. It is in that spirit that on 10 December Mr. Jean-Marc Ayrault, Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, will hold a ministerial meeting in Paris for those who reject the current strategy of total war and wish to relaunch efforts towards a negotiated solution as soon as possible.

That is the call I am making today on behalf of France. It is a call to action and to urge us to unite around our shared goals, shouldering our responsibilities together. On top of everything else, the credibility of the Security Council is at stake and deeply engaged in the tragedy that is Syria.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Humanitarian agencies cannot get into Aleppo. They are encountering enormous difficulties in getting into many parts of Syria and, quite simply, cannot do their work. That is the clear conclusion that I have drawn today from the briefings by Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien

and Mr. Geert Cappelaere. That is why I would also like to thank the United Kingdom and France for calling for today's urgent meeting. Unfortunately, what we have to note in the meeting is a double failure for the Security Council — first, because it has not been able to bring peace and security to Syria, and, secondly, because it has shown itself to be incapable of enforcing international humanitarian law.

The figures are enlightening. The food ran out on 14 November, and we now have 100,000 children in a situation that is beyond desperate. And, simply, that is Syria's future, because it will have to be rebuilt, and it is those children of today who will represent the Syria of tomorrow. All of us, especially the members of the Council, know that Spain, along with New Zealand and Egypt, has been working on the humanitarian issue in Syria, a job for which we take full responsibility and that we are trying to carry out in complete transparency. What we are working on is a plan for achieving a rapprochement of Council members' positions on the issue. It is not a review, it is an exercise in rapprochement. We hope that it will still be possible to reach an agreement.

I would like to conclude by recalling something that might seem obvious but that I believe is fundamental — the total validity of the basic elements of resolution 2254 (2015) and resolution 2268 (2016), on Syria. Once again, these are still valid: access for humanitarian aid, the cessation of hostilities, the separation of opposition groups from terrorists and a renewal of the political dialogue. They are the only viable alternatives for ending the war in Syria.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are meeting today to listen once again to an account detailing the suffering of our brother people of Syria under the blows of protracted proxy conflict, against a backdrop of successive failures — not just a failure to reach a final settlement of the crisis, but a failure even to mitigate it. Despite the deep political divisions between the parties with influence in the conflict — which have had an impact on the Security Council performance on the issue, rendering it incapable of producing a result in three previous attempts that sought only to salvage what was salvageable — we have a duty to our brothers and sisters in Syria. Egypt has therefore been working with our fellow penholders, Spain and New Zealand, to reach a minimum consensus on measures that can be taken on the Syria dossier, particularly regarding Aleppo, with a view to alleviating humanitarian suffering. In that regard, we have developed a comprehensive approach in the form of a draft resolution that covers most of the urgent issues as much as possible.

The draft resolution includes principal points, the most important of which is halting attacks by all parties in Aleppo for at least 10 successive days in order to allow immediate and urgent humanitarian access to the inhabitants of the city through full coordination with the United Nations and its partners. It also includes elements related to the necessity of implementing the cessation of hostilities across Syria in accordance with resolution 2268 (2016). It also includes support for instruments to help monitor that implementation. The draft resolution clearly calls for cooperation and coordination to annihilate the pockets of terrorism in Syria and the terrorist groups that control major parts of the Syrian territory. It also clearly calls upon all parties to heed the will of the international community by putting an end to all cooperation and association with all terrorist groups, particularly Jabhat Al-Nusra Front and Jabhat Fatah Al-Sham. That would be at the political or operational level. The draft resolution also reaffirms the pivotal role of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) and its two co-Chairs so that the ISSG could work to implement the elements I just mentioned. It calls for the start of serious negotiations between the Syrian parties on a transitional period in accordance with the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2016) as soon as possible. We, along with our partner penholders, took the utmost care in making the drafting of the draft resolution clear and unambiguous. It includes a reporting mechanism of the Secretary-General on its implementation. It is time for all parties to shoulder their responsibility with respect to the Syrian people.

Despite the clear linkage between the events in Syria, the concept of Arab national security and the national security of Egypt, and in the light of the historic relations that link the Egyptian and Syrian peoples — Egypt and Syria actually used to be one State — Egypt has kept a clean record with respect to its position on the Syrian crisis over the past years. Since the beginning of the crisis, we have neither supported any specific party to the conflict nor engaged in any attempts to exploit the Syrian tragedy. That is in spite of certain political interests. I would like to reaffirm that Egypt will continue down that path. We will not contribute — whether through words, action or inaction — to the destruction of a brotherly Arab

country, regardless of any justification or reason. We will continue to implement a policy towards Syria that does not take anything into consideration apart from Syrian interests and their hopes of a democratic, unified, sovereign and safe State that is free of terrorism and extremism. We will not submit to compromise or political interests. Those are actually the reasons for the daily unprecedented tragedies that have led to the displacement and loss of lives of millions of innocent Syrians.

In conclusion, I would like to call upon everyone — members of the Council, members of the ISSG and other relevant parties that may hold influence — to set their own interests and political grievances aside. We should all genuinely work to resolve this crisis, which has had disastrous effects at the humanitarian, political and security levels.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): New Zealand welcomes today's briefing on the events unfolding in eastern Aleppo. We thank the briefers and commend them and the brave people that have been working with them in such difficult circumstances.

Over the past five years, New Zealand has been highly critical of the Security Council's failure to live up to its responsibilities with regard to the ongoing conflict in Syria. We have not been alone in doing so. For much of that time, the Council has remained largely silent as the country has unravelled and the fighting has become more cruel and more brutal. Often, we have been prevented from acting or even speaking due to the inability or unwillingness of some of the Council's most powerful members to move beyond their own politics and vested interests. That has prevented the Council from putting in place measures that would have saved lives. The people of Syria have paid, and continue to pay, a terrible price for that inaction, and so do their neighbours.

New Zealand has been working with Spain and Egypt to find a way through that impasse. We have sought to cut through the politics and the polemics and focus on agreeing on action that can make a practical difference on the ground. We have tried to work constructively with all key players to that end. The draft resolution that we put forth yesterday is a manifestation of those efforts. Our objectives in putting forth the draft resolution are the same that have guided our engagement on this issue since joining the Council, and the same that led my Prime Minister to convene a high-level meeting on the issue during our September presidency: to reduce the violence, restore the ceasefire, enable humanitarian assistance to reach those most in need and create space for the resumption of political talks on an end to the conflict.

A key focus has necessarily been on seeking to address the grave situation unfolding in Aleppo. Over the past few months, we have seen the presence of a few hundred Al-Nusra Front terrorists in eastern Aleppo used to justify an all-out attack on more than 250,000 civilians. Every hospital in opposition-held areas has been destroyed. No humanitarian assistance has been allowed in since July, despite several pauses in the airstrikes. We have seen indiscriminate attacks on eastern Aleppo that have killed and injured many in western Aleppo. In the past few weeks, it has become clear that the Syrian Government has eschewed efforts to establish a ceasefire and resume political talks in favour of pursuing a military outcome. The result is another humanitarian catastrophe. We urgently need to halt the hostilities in Aleppo in order to get humanitarian assistance to those who so desperately need it. We call on all parties to work in coordination with the United Nations to ensure humanitarian assistance is delivered to those who remain in eastern Aleppo.

We are disappointed that the parties have not yet been able to agree on terms to implement the United Nations four-point plan. We also need urgent action to protect those fleeing eastern Aleppo and assurances regarding the fate of those taken into custody by the Syrian Government. The draft resolution that New Zealand, Egypt and Spain submitted to Council members yesterday seeks to start a process to put the protection of civilians at our highest priority. The text represents the minimum that is required for a credible response from the Council, and we urge all Council members to support it. However, it will mean little unless we see urgent changes in the behaviour of the parties themselves, including some at this table.

Some may argue that our text addresses yesterday's issues and is no longer relevant to the situation on the ground, especially in Aleppo. An immediate ceasefire in Aleppo would undoubtedly address the most pressing humanitarian needs to get desperately needed humanitarian and medical assistance to traumatized civilians and to allow those civilians who want to get out to get out safely to a destination of their choice.

Some may argue that the implementation of our resolution would give aid to the terrorists. We cannot exclude the possibility that terrorist groups may try to use a ceasefire to their advantage, but despite the rhetoric of terrorism that is regularly heaped on this conflict, the conflict between the Syrian Government and its people is not fundamentally about terrorism. Terrorism is an incident of the conflict, not its cause or rationale. In sacrificing the lives of hundreds of civilians and putting hundreds of thousands into misery and suffering cannot be justified by waving the banner of counter-terrorism.

Like Staffan de Mistura, we do not accept that the military advances into Aleppo will lead to the objective towards which the Council has allegedly been working for so many years — a political settlement leading to a stable and unified Syria, living at peace with itself and its neighbours. While our immediate focus must be on saving lives, we urge all parties to the conflict to recommit themselves to a political solution and a return to talks and a pathway towards sustainable peace and national reconciliation.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy De Mistura, Under-Secretary-General O'Brien and Mr. Cappelaere for their appropriately grim briefings.

Like my British colleague, I would like to respond to the question that Under-Secretary-General O'Brien said is posed to him wherever he goes, whether in Syria or in the region, or when meeting with citizens or politicians. Why cannot the Security Council come together to find a solution? I have to say that we grapple with a lot of really difficult questions. That is not one of them. It is a very straightforward and very unfortunate fact that the Security Council does not come together to answer the cries of the civilians we have heard about again today because Russia, a permanent member, does not want to. That is it. It is very straightforward.

The words we are hearing out of eastern Aleppo now are as dark as any we have heard in our lifetimes. A "death trip" — that is what civilians are calling their journey to flee eastern Aleppo, according to a teacher who as of yesterday had decided to stay there. According to the Red Cross, 20,000 people have fled eastern Aleppo just since Saturday — 20,000 people in four days on a death trip. One fleeing woman was seen pushing a wheelchair with her dead mother in it. She told a reporter, "My mother died of hunger", and said that they had almost nothing to eat for five months.

In another part of the city, amateur footage showed stray body parts scattered among debris where an air strike had reportedly just killed at least 20 people. Survivors wept over the remains. Planes — Syrian Government planes — take brief breaks from bombing runs to blanket eastern Aleppo with leaflets. We have talked about leaflets here before, but one of the leaflets dropped a few days ago reportedly read:

> "Do not be stupid. Think about yourselves and your families. Victory is coming for the Syrian Arab Army. Think quickly because time is passing and it is not on your side."

We all know that time is not on the side of the civilians trapped in eastern Aleppo. The longer the bombing raids go on and the greater their intensity, the higher the odds that they or someone they love will be maimed or killed. But leaving carries extraordinary risks, such as being detained or disappeared by regime soldiers or killed on the death trip itself, where snipers are having a field day, it seems.

I would ask Council members and all citizens of the world to just force themselves to take a break from their day and watch the images from eastern Aleppo — parents cradling their children in agony; civilians on foot mowed down while carrying their suitcases, which lie beside their lifeless bodies. We will likely hear from the representatives of Syria and the Russian Federation today that these images are made up; they are propaganda. That is an argument we have been hearing in the past few meetings.

Now I have to acknowledge that both the Syrian Government and the Russian Government have significant expertise in making things up. They are great authorities in general on propaganda, but we have to recognize that they have an interest in trying to create a post-truth world where all facts are contested and there is no truth but just one person's claim or one country's claim or one party's claim against another. Syria and Russia, as they lie and kill civilians in Syria, count on there being no referee who will adjudicate truths, on the one hand, from lies, falsehoods and fictions, on the other. That is their gamble.

But we have referees. The United Nations briefers we have just heard from are our referees. They have no interest in doing anything other than calling it as

it is. They are independent; they are humanitarians. The carnage is a fact. It is a truth and it is now. The 14,000 terrified civilians, some completely hysterical, who have been driven into Government-held territory under gunfire and air strike attacks are also our referees. Endless numbers of authenticated photos and videos of human-caused slaughter are our referees. There is no denying the truth and the facts, not even in the upside-down land which the perpetrators of this slaughter inhabit.

For months since the siege of eastern Aleppo began, we have met in the Council to demand the basics. We have called for the Al-Assad regime and Russia to allow unfettered humanitarian access to the Syrians in the city and to stop systematically bombing the city's hospitals, schools and markets and the bases of the first responders. Those are appeals that the Security Council should not even have to request — should not ever have to request. The Council should not have to demand compliance with international humanitarian laws or with our prior resolutions, yet here we are urging two States Members of the United Nations, one of which holds a permanent seat on the Council, to abide by those basic standards and to stop ripping up the rule books, which will have effects way beyond Syria for our children and grandchildren.

When it seemed impossible to imagine a more horrific situation, in fact the crisis got worse. The past five days have witnessed one of the most extreme bombardments of civilian areas in the entire life of the conflict, ravaging what was left of the once majestic eastern part of Aleppo. The objective is simple — to take eastern Aleppo by force with no regard for the consequences it may have for innocent civilians. We are all in the broken-record club. We are all broken records on the Council — including those who are actively involved in carrying out the siege of Aleppo — in saying that there is no military solution to this brutal conflict and that the only way out is a political solution.

But that is pablum. The regime and Russia believe the opposite. They are pursuing their approach; they are strategic. They are following a blueprint. They believe in a military solution. The choice they are giving civilians is explicit. It is the same choice they included in a previous leaflet: leave or be annihilated.

For those who choose to leave, the regime and its Russian allies have promised residents of eastern Aleppo passage through so-called safe routes. I am sure we will hear more about these routes today. And if Syrian and Russia propaganda is any predictor, we may hear how civilians upon escaping are embracing regime forces as liberators. Do they really expect us to believe that civilians who have been starved — who have not received a morsel of food since July — have been barrel-bombed, mortared, pick-off by snipers and threatened with annihilation are likely to meet the people responsible for those horrors as their saviours? Is that how it works? Is that how any of us would feel or act?

The reason people are fleeing by the thousands is not because they trust a regime that has killed hundreds of thousands of its own people and systematically tortured tens of thousands more Syrians in its gulags, tagging the bodies of those it kills with serial numbers. No, it is because they know that there is a good chance they will be pulverized if they stay where they are.

As we all know, and as others have argued persuasively here today, Egypt, Spain and New Zealand have presented a draft resolution that would require an immediate halt to military action in Aleppo for a minimum of 10 days. If implemented, this halt would give the civilians of eastern Aleppo a brief break from the relentless bombardment. It would allow some aid to reach people who are surviving by digging through trash for scraps and by eating weeds. It would allow for an orderly departure facilitated by the United Nations. It would also get at least some medicine to doctors who have been compelled to operate on patients without anaesthetic, sometimes in the middle of the street alongside their bombed-out hospitals and clinics. This draft resolution should be brought to a vote without delay, and it should be adopted with the Council's unanimous support. This is a no-brainer. Anyone who says otherwise does not have the survival of Syrian civilians at heart.

But let us also be real. While any pause in the butchery that we are witnessing in eastern Aleppo would be welcome — and we are in favour of it — a brief pause to get a bit of food and medicine in before the savage bombing resumes is not a solution. It is barely even a Band-Aid. It is a sign in some ways of just how low our bar has become.

Russia may again use its veto to prevent the Security Council from offering help to the desperate civilians in eastern Aleppo, as it did in October. If it does so, placing its military aims over the survival of Syrian

men, women and children, Member States must swiftly consider the other tools we can employ at the United Nations, including through the General Assembly, to apply more effective pressure.

Let me conclude. Umm Leen is the mother of seven kids in eastern Aleppo. She has already lost one child during the war — her 12-year-old boy — who was killed when his heart was pierced by shrapnel. In the midst of the siege now, she worries that she will lose more. Her daughter is beset with an awful cough, but there is nowhere to take her since the children's hospital was bombed. But her sickest is her youngest child, a baby she had during the siege, who is now just three months old. The baby has been dogged by serious health problems since he was born prematurely. He is grossly underweight and routinely has difficulty breathing. Without access to baby formula, Umm Leen has taken to feeding him ground-up rice. When parents in Aleppo have a new baby, Umm Leen said,

> "some believe they are making up for the children they have lost. But for me in these conditions I think it is a huge mistake. After I gave birth to him, I felt so sad. Did I give birth to him to see a life like this?"

This is what it is to be a parent in eastern Aleppo, where mother and fathers live in perpetual fear that their children will be taken from them, whether by the flash of a barrel bomb or the slow, gnawing attrition of illness — man-made illness — and starvation. The Security Council must not stand by as more and more children like Umm Leen's hang in the balance. A pause is the absolute least we can do, but we can and must do better than a pause. We must continue to work to end this conflict — and end it not by the devastating military means that the Al-Assad regime and Russia are intent on pursuing, which will only prolong and deepen the suffering we are now witnessing.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): We have recently been witnessing a steady escalation of the situation in some parts of Syria, including Aleppo, with the humanitarian situation there steadily worsening, triggering the international community's widespread concern. China feels for the people who are suffering in Syria and condemns any attack targeting civilians and civilian facilities.

To ease the tension in Aleppo and other areas, the international community should advance its efforts along four tracks in a balanced way. The four tracks are ceasefire, political negotiation, humanitarian assistance and the joint fight against terrorism.

The international community should urge all parties in Syria to end hostilities without delay and work unremittingly to reach an agreement on the relevant issues through peace talks. The international community should continue to step up humanitarian relief to Aleppo. China welcomes the concrete initiatives taken by Russia and the Syrian Government to increase assistance to civilians and hopes that United Nations aid agencies will strengthen coordination with Russia and the Syrian Government to jointly ease the humanitarian situation in Syria, pursuant to the United Nations principles governing humanitarian assistance. Terrorist groups continue to launch attacks in Aleppo and other areas, causing civilian casualties and blocking humanitarian efforts, which calls for greater coordination by the international community to resolutely combat by uniform standards all the terrorist groups designated by the Security Council.

How things transpire and evolve in Aleppo, as a subset of the Syrian issue, is part and parcel of the grand scheme of things pertaining to the question of Syria. A comprehensive solution to de-escalate the situation in Aleppo lies in an effort to remain seized of the big picture in Syria, to hold fast to the prospect of a political settlement as the overarching direction, to maintain the role of the United Nations as the primary player exercising good offices and to continue supporting the work of Special Envoy De Mistura towards the early resumption of the Geneva talks.

Any action taken by the Council on the question of Syria must be truly conducive to de-escalation, to pushing all parties in Syria to an immediate cessation of hostilities in support of, and in cooperation with, United Nations humanitarian efforts, and to facilitating a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process under the good offices of the United Nations, so that a solution that is acceptable to all parties may be reached. The parties should demonstrate their goodwill, meet one another half way, build mutual trust and jointly strive towards achieving a comprehensive, fair and proper solution to the question of Syria.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Rightly or wrongly, humanitarian issues have recently increasingly become a subject for the Security Council's attention. We think that it is now high time to hold a substantive discussion on the Middle East and

North Africa and organize a thematic debate on the topic of the catastrophic consequences of the destruction of the statehood of countries of the region as a result of foreign interference.

The number of victims are in the millions. However, we have heard nothing relevant from those who are guilty for those tragedies. Indeed, the war was launched by the invasion of Iraq spearheaded by the United States and the United Kingdom, and it has effectively been continuing for 13 years. The collapse of a prosperous Libya led to the destabilization of vast swaths of North Africa. Syria was turned into a conflict zone of rivalry for regional leadership, with there being no qualms about using the potential of openly terrorist organizations. Moreover, the humanitarian tragedy that we have heard about today is not considered to be sufficient justification for abandoning that bankrupt policy. Some have sought to hide their failed geopolitical adventures through cynical sanctimony, and even lies, which is something that we often run up against when discussing the subject of Syria in the Security Council; today's meeting has been no exception.

The humanitarian situation in Syria cannot be discussed separately from the other challenges set out in Security Council decisions and by the International Syria Support Group, namely, combating terrorism and seeking political settlement and the establishment of a regime for the cessation of hostilities. In that regard, we see a clear contradiction. It seems that Mr. De Mistura has forgotten that his primary role is to promote the political process. He cannot find it in himself to resume Syrian talks, which were suspended back in May, or to clearly admit why that happened, that is, the complete unwillingness of the opposition to hold serious talks. We hope that in Mr. De Mistura's statement to the Security Council on 8 December we will finally hear something concrete.

We need to acknowledge the failure of the concept of "moderate opposition". It was never convincingly embodied at the political level, and, militarily speaking, the few opposition fighters turned out to be soldiers of the Al-Nusra Front and other extremist groups. It seems there is an attempt to offset the United Nations inertia at the political level with one-upmanship on humanitarian issues: Who can make the grander statement? Who can propose the more dazzling initiative? However, when matters come to a head, those initiatives are either rejected by the opposition, or the United Nations itself is unable to implement them. That fully applies to the situation in eastern Aleppo.

We share the grave concerns about the plight of civilians in eastern Aleppo, but easing their suffering will not come about by halting the counter-terrorist operation. Leaving Syria and Iraq as terrorist caliphates or calling on terrorists to use a humanist approach are also not alternatives. The current situation could have been avoided if the promise given to us at the end of February by the Central Intelligence Agency Director, Mr. Brennan, had been kept, namely, to separate, in the space of two or three weeks, the so-called moderate militants, if any even exist, from the terrorists. That promise was repeatedly renewed, including at the highest level, but still nothing has been done. It is clear that we were being led by the nose the whole time. Either our United States partners and their allies were in actual fact unable, or did not have the resources, to keep their promise, or rather they simply did not want to. Instead, they continued their dangerous attempts to use terrorists as a tool for regime change in Syria.

It comes as no surprise that it was France and the United Kingdom, which have long and blatantly clamoured for regime change in Syria, including providing generous support to militants, that initiated today's meeting — out of their supposed concern for the situation in eastern Aleppo. In fact, the real reason is different. The bandits that they, among others, have so coddled and fuelled are at the point of defeat. Almost half of that part of the city has been liberated. It could be the biggest moral victory of the Syrian army since 2012, when jihadist units were sent to the northern capital and started to gain a foothold, sponsored and armed from abroad.

Today's meeting is a desperate attempt to use the Security Council to save terrorists from destruction in Aleppo. Incidentally, the constant blocking of the proposal to place on the sanctions list of the Security Council such terrorist groups as Ahrar Al-Sham, Jaysh Al-Islam and others has the same aim. It is clear that any help given to militants in Aleppo is categorically support for Al-Nusra terrorists, since it is that group that is on the Security Council sanctions list and that is directing the military operations of all of the illegal armed groups in the neighbourhoods that have been captured.

We vehemently condemn any attempts to protect terrorists, including any political action under a

humanitarian pretext, which, sadly, United Nations humanitarian workers have been dragged into. How else are we to interpret, for example, the fact that the 200,000 residents of besieged Deir ez-Zor, which even by the United Nations analysis makes up a quarter of all besieged Syrians, only receive 1 per cent of the humanitarian assistance? Why has nobody even talked about the fact that the pseudo-humanitarian White Helmets, which were recently nominated for a Nobel Prize, made an incredibly cynical video clip of the rescue operations that they had supposedly carried out, which they posted online? Where is the condemnation of all of those unforgivable fake allegations that we should expect from the supposedly objective, impartial Western media? Why was there no condemnation of that by the United States representative earlier today, who is a professional journalist herself? The standards of United States journalism, and even policy, have now sunk to tabloid level, startling the whole world, and disinformation has become a typical tactic of United States diplomacy.

The fact that humanitarian problems do not seem to genuinely interest Paris, London, Washington or some others is clear from their indifferent attitudes to the suffering of the people in Mosul. Nor does the disastrous humanitarian situation in Yemen seem to bother them either. There over 80 per cent of the population is in need of assistance. As for Aleppo, following the liberation of the northern sector of eastern Aleppo, thousands of people who were being held by militants as human shields have finally had a chance to leave the city to receive food assistance and basic essentials. According to the information we have on those neighbourhoods, 6,500 people have already left, including 2,800 children.

The Russian Federation continues to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to the residents of Aleppo. At the instruction of the President of Russia, the Ministry of Defence is sending a special medical unit, which includes a multipurpose hospital with 100 beds and a specialized paediatric therapy department, with a daily capacity for mobile/ambulatory treatment of 420 people. The Ministry of Emergency Situations is also delivering a field hospital with 50 places for stationary treatment, with the possibility of providing ambulatory assistance to 200 patients per day.

We trust that the necessary humanitarian assistance will be provided to civilians who are able to escape their captors by United Nations humanitarian actors, which have focused their particular attention on eastern Aleppo. Incidentally, I was surprised how my United States colleague, who unfortunately left the meeting, argued that the residents of eastern Aleppo were unlikely to move to Government-controlled western Aleppo because the Government was torturing them. However, it seems that she is wrong. United Nations humanitarian workers have repeatedly told us that, in all cases, when Syrian residents come out of a siege, they always end up going to Government-controlled areas. It therefore seems it is the terrorists, not the Government, whom they consider their torturers.

Against that backdrop, we do not understand the wish of the so-called humanitarian troika of the Security Council to force through a non-consensual draft resolution on Aleppo. That will not help anything. Rather, it will see a repeat of the dangerous situation we had on 8 October, when the French delegation tried to put forward a draft text (S/2016/846) that did not have the support of all Council members (see S/PV.7785). Without taking into account our concerns, no draft resolution will be adopted. We have seen such attempts before. Calls for unity in the Council alternate with hopeless draft texts being put forward for vote. It is a pointless tactic.

A key condition for any ceasefire and for providing humanitarian assistance is separating the non-terrorist militants from Al-Nusra. There need to be clear, mandatory, unconditional instructions that terrorists who are on the Security Council's terrorist list should be excluded from any ceasefire regime. We propose to the troika not to be so hasty with votes and, given the current situation, to think about how they could modify their draft resolution to reflect the United Nations humanitarian plan for Aleppo. Overall, Russia supports all impartial international humanitarian efforts and is ready to work in the interest of implementing such efforts. Incidentally, the Castello Road has been fully freed up now and can be used for the passage of transportation carrying humanitarian assistance. Sadly, before, the United States, notwithstanding all its humanitarian rhetoric, refused to stand with our troops to guarantee the Castello Road delivery of humanitarian assistance. But at present we do not need the help of the United States nor the consent of the opposition, so now we hope that the Castello Road will be effectively used by the United Nations.

However, for the plan to succeed, it obviously must first be properly prepared. We need firm guarantees

from militants for the signatures of their commanders that they will not obstruct the passage of humanitarian convoys. Relevant guarantees must also be given by the United Nations itself. It is important to have an advance list of victims and casualties for evacuation and lists of medical personnel for rotation. We need to have an idea of the specific types of humanitarian assistance and arrangements for distribution among those in need. All steps need to be agreed to by the Syrian Government and all groups operating in eastern Aleppo. Otherwise, it will just turn into another propaganda ruse that has no chance of succeeding.

In terms of separating militants, we need to call on them and the so-called local councils to compile lists of Al-Nusra Front terrorists that need to be taken out of the city, and also lists of armed individuals who themselves wish to leave eastern Aleppo. If our Western colleagues are truly concerned about the plight of civilians in eastern Aleppo, and indeed in the whole of Syria, then they need above all to take genuine and practical steps — stop supporting terrorists and lift unilateral sanctions. They need to provide actual help, which Russia is doing, and not try to use sensitive humanitarian problems to advance or achieve their own political goals.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I thank the delegations of the United Kingdom and France for initiating this emergency meeting, and the Senegalese presidency for organizing it. Let me also express thanks to our briefers for their remarkable yet sobering perspectives on the latest developments in Syria.

Emboldened by the military momentum and the full-fledged support it receives from its backers, the Syrian regime shows no mercy and appears to be ready to sink the whole of Syria into bloodshed of a magnitude yet unseen, which is something that we have warned the Security Council about since we joined it 11 months ago.

According to the media and independent sources, just yesterday the Syrian military committed a horrible massacre in the neighbourhood of Bab Al-Nairab, which claimed the lives of 25 civilians, of which most were women and children. They were hit by air strikes while trying to escape eastern Aleppo on foot; they were ordinary civilians, not terrorists. The military operation in Aleppo is not about countering the terrorist threat, but about crushing the opposition to the Syrian regime. It is about gaining ground. The control of territory and the reanimation of the Syrian regime are the primary aims of those who invest military, financial and diplomatic assets and manpower in supporting the lifeline of the brutal dictatorship. But in fact, the only result of the ongoing operation to retake Aleppo will be the strengthening of the terrorist groups inside Syria and throughout the wider region. Al-Qaida will benefit immensely by acquiring much stronger capabilities for recruiting new members in Syria among those wishing to continue resistance against the Al-Assad regime and those who are discouraged by the continuing absence of a political solution. The international campaign to eradicate Da'esh will also suffer a huge blow.

We are further dismayed by the fact that, instead of choosing to go along with the Special Envoy's initiative for Aleppo, the regime forces and its allies are pursuing the path of military offenses and the annihilation of their opponents. In our opinion, that proves one thing — our problem is not a lack of strong and well-thought-out initiatives and resolutions, but rather a lack of commitment, monitoring, accountability and implementation. Aleppo is the bifurcation point of the Syrian conflict. Damascus and its allies are using the current escalation to support their long-term strategy to render the city uninhabitable and to depopulate its opposition-controlled districts.

Reducing Aleppo to ashes and then calling for political talks is not an option, or maybe it is according to the Syrian and Russian military. Al-Assad and Russia have gotten one step closer to turning Aleppo into another Grozny. The world should not sit idly by and let that happen. We call on Russia and the Syrian regime to respect the agreed obligations, including the cessation of hostilities, particularly in Aleppo, and to secure the possibility of providing humanitarian aid to the besieged areas. The world wonders how many more meetings of the Council need to be convened to achieve such a simple and humane goal.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I would like to express my gratitude to Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien and UNICEF Regional Director Geert Cappelaere.

Less than ten days ago, at the monthly briefing here in the Chamber on the humanitarian situation in Syria (see S/PV.7817), I said that our meetings must not simply be venues for expressing our concern about the devastating circumstances, but rather we must take action and achieve concrete results. Unfortunately,

the Security Council has not achieved concrete results since that time.

Today the briefers described the disastrous results of the escalation of the recent fighting in Aleppo. Japan commends all humanitarian workers for their invaluable, courageous efforts to seek every opportunity to ensure protection and access. But the severe shortage of food rations, health essentials and other lifesaving supplies in eastern Aleppo is posing a grave threat to the population as winter approaches.

We have repeatedly called on the relevant States to exert the strongest possible influence on the fighting parties. We must do absolutely everything possible to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Aleppo, so as to protect civilians and medical personnel, undertake urgent medical evacuations and rehabilitate medical services. Japan reiterates its support for the co-penholders — Egypt, New Zealand and Spain — in their efforts to arrive at a draft resolution. We also support the initiative to unify the voice of the international community in the General Assembly. The Security Council must take action and should not be viewed as incapable of responding to a humanitarian crisis of such magnitude.

I heard with keen interest what Special Envoy De Mistura had to say. He affirmed his view that military logic is prevailing on both sides. I agree with the Special Envoy that a stable and durable solution, one that ensures non-recurrence of terrorist threats, cannot be achieved through military means. We must be persistent in seeking a negotiated settlement. Special Envoy De Mistura told us that, when he meets the Council on 8 December, he would like to explain some options that exist. I look forward to listening to him. In the meantime, we must deal with the urgent humanitarian crisis. We must unite to uphold the strategy and take action.

Mrs. Adnin (Malaysia): I thank Special Envoy De Mistura, Mr. O'Brien of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and Mr. Cappelaere of UNICEF for their respective briefings.

Today's briefings once again highlighted the horrifying situation in eastern Aleppo, as the war in the Syria continues to become even more brutal and deadly. Just last week, we listened to Mr. O'Brien urge the Security Council to take action to stop the carnage in eastern Aleppo (see S/PV.7817). Regrettably, our continued failure to converge on efforts to end the suffering of Syrians has led to more intense aerial bombardment and a ferocious ground assault on the besieged area of eastern Aleppo. We remain gravely concerned that the incessant and indiscriminate military offensive against civilians in eastern Aleppo has now forced some 25,000 people to flee their already destroyed homes. It is alarming that, in their attempt to flee for safety, their fate remains uncertain. We are also appalled that the military escalation has killed scores of innocent civilians, many of whom are women and children, and injured thousands more.

The chilling operation in eastern Aleppo in recent days makes a mockery of the Security Council-mandated ceasefire in Aleppo. We echo the sentiment that it is never premature to save lives, and we call on all members of the Council to work towards mandating a ceasefire, even if for a brief period, to allow for a safe and unfettered humanitarian operation. We also urge all parties to the conflict to immediately sign on and agree to the United Nations humanitarian four-point plan for Aleppo.

We have collectively called for a political solution to the Syrian conflict at each and every deliberation by the Council on this issue. It seems that it is one perspective that is shared by all Council members. Yet the military offensive and escalation of violence continues unabated.

The advance of Syrian forces into eastern Aleppo signifies that the fighting in the coming days will only intensify. The carpet bombing of the city only reflects that the pretext of fighting terrorism is no longer valid and the aim now clearly is to gain a military advantage and capture the strategic importance of Aleppo. Even as the fighting in eastern Aleppo is likely to intensify, the deliberate and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and schools, must not be tolerated. We require no reminder that attacks against schools and hospitals are among the grave violations against children.

We strongly condemn the use of barrel bombs, which the Government previously committed not to use. There can be no justification for the use of barrel bombs in civilian populated areas — an act that reflects blatant disregard for human life.

Powerless children, who account for more than one third of the population of eastern Aleppo, bear the biggest brunt of the violence in the besieged city. Starvation, bombs, burns, the absence of medical care

and sieges are among the many ways that the children of Aleppo are dying. In each report received by the Council, more than half of the casualties are children, thereby raising the question of what we are we going to do about it.

We call upon those countries in and outside of the Council with influence over the Syrian Government to leverage their influence to stop the carnage and resolve this protracted conflict. We have the chance to right the wrong and to stop further suffering. In fact, we have the obligation to ensure that the Council responds to this depressing development. The coming days are crucial, and it is our sincere hope that the long-held silence on the part of the Council on the Syrian conflict will be broken.

Mr. Suárez Moreno (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank Messrs. De Mistura, O'Brien and Cappelaere for their briefings.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela expresses its concern about the humanitarian situation in Syria, especially in the city of Aleppo. That is why we value the efforts of the humanitarian agencies, which, at great risk and in situations of all-out conflict, do extraordinary work to help millions of Syrians. We appreciate the fact that the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, together with the Syrian Government, has helped thousands of people by providing food, medicine and other necessities in the recently liberated areas. Of special importance is the delivery of food and medicine to Foa'a, Kefraya, Madaya and Zabadani under the four-towns agreements. In that context, we support initiatives aimed at alleviating the humanitarian tragedy in Aleppo. Nevertheless, such proposals need to take into account the nature and scope of terrorism as a destabilizing factor.

Our country has been denouncing the threat of terrorism to peace and stability in Syria and the region for some time now. As Mr. De Mistura said, the existence of terrorism in Aleppo is clear. The Al-Nusra Front, with the support of various armed groups that some have described as moderate, holds more than 200,000 people hostage and unable to leave the area under its control. The Syrian Government therefore has a legitimate right to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity against terrorism.

We therefore welcome the fact that areas of eastern Aleppo have been liberated where more than 90,000 people live. It is a paradox that the so-called moderate opposition says that in Aleppo and other parts of the country there are people who, instead of fighting terrorists from the Al-Nusra Front and associated groups, are preventing civilians from leaving by way of military operations. Since October, they have blocked and rejected a series of humanitarian pauses in eastern Aleppo.

The humanitarian situation in Syria is worsening by the day, as indicated by today's briefers. We therefore hope that we can achieve a minimum level of consensus to facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid, without halting the fighting against terrorist groups and their affiliates.

As Mr. Cappelaere mentioned, Syrians, and especially children, are asking "Why?". We also wonder why some members of the international community are continuing to finance non-State armed groups with the single goal of achieving national interests without caring for the suffering of millions of people. That is why it is necessary to end the interventionist and destabilizing policies that deny the Syrian people their right to live in peace as a sovereign and free nation.

Finally, we would reiterate that overcoming the humanitarian crisis is linked to ending the armed conflict. That is why we reaffirm our support to Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Staffan de Mistura, in his efforts towards peace aimed at finding a peaceful political solution to the Syrian armed conflict. As tragic as the situation is on the ground, it cannot be an obstacle to the parties negotiating without preconditions. As all members of the Council have said, political solutions are the only way to grapple with the reality. Prolonging the conflict will lead only to greater suffering and destruction.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): We thank Mr. De Mistura, Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Cappelaere for their briefings and commend their tireless efforts to assist Syria and Syrians in securing a better present and brighter future.

We acknowledge our regret to be involved in this acrimonious debate over the unbearable fate of the Syrian people. Like the briefers and Security Council members who preceded us, we are deeply distressed about the intensified military operations, including ground offensives and aerial bombardments, over the past few days in eastern Aleppo. For almost two years, we have called on all parties to consider the devastating impact of the conflict on the civilian population and to resort to dialogue in order to find appropriate solutions

to the humanitarian and political issues affecting the Syrian population, including Aleppo.

However, the reality is that all sides have, first, chosen the military option and, secondly, intend to continue receiving logistical and military support, including heavy weaponry being supplied to the various opposition groups by international stakeholders, including some prominent members of the Council, while the Government is seemingly determined to regain control of significant rebel-held areas and reinstate the authority of the State in Aleppo and the territorial integrity of the country.

We fully agree as to the need to urgently put in place the means to end the hostilities and to allow humanitarian aid to get through unhindered. The number of civilian casualties and displaced persons is inexcusable, and we strongly condemn all indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Against such a backdrop, what are the options? To submit yet another draft resolution, probably to no avail, while civilians continue to die? To call urgent meetings of the Security Council? To issue pious condemnations of the escalating violence while continuing to supply weapons to the rebels of the so-called moderate opposition or to crypto-terrorists? Or to end the irrational policy of "Al-Assad must go", accept the Syrian Government's sovereignty and resolutely pursue ways to bring about a political solution to the crisis?

To conclude, we wish to reiterate our position that we in no way condone violence against the civilian population in Syria or anywhere else. However, we also repudiate the financial and logistical support being provided to non-State armed groups and to rebels who openly cooperate with terrorist groups and who commit grave violations of human rights, including using civilians as human shields. This is the situation prevailing in eastern Aleppo: a civilian population being held hostage by armed groups and terrorists that, if given a chance, will surely flee to another life free from the yoke of extremists and terrorists.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I, too, should like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Mr. Stephen O'Brien and Mr. Cappelaere for their tireless work.

Let me be slightly cynical today and say that we have come to this meeting and have heard more of the same, just worse. We are continuing our discussions as bombs continue to rain down on hospitals, schools and civilian infrastructure. Staffan de Mistura said, and several of us have taken note of his comments, that the logic of war prevails today on both sides, as both have clearly decided to continue to pursue the military option. What he did not say is that this war is utterly barbaric and does not even respect those incomprehensible things known as the rules of war.

Using this military logic, the strategic importance of Aleppo to both sides has swept everything aside — all human and humanitarian values. When we came to the Council, the primary concerns were the horrors taking place in the medieval cities of the Kefraya, Madaya and Fo'ah. But these fell away from our consideration at the same time as Aleppo started to gain strategic importance, and then we started to consider the horrors of Aleppo, which, at another meeting, we referred to as carnage and a massacre. Today all of those fighting in Aleppo are guided by the barbaric logic of war and are indiscriminately bombing civilian structures, homes, schools and hospitals.

All of them claim to be fighting terrorists. But we see the bodies of children being pulled from the rubble of schools; they presumably were not terrorists. We see the bodies of patients being pulled from the rubble of hospitals; they presumably were not terrorists. We see the bodies of women and elderly people being pulled from the ruins of homes and buildings; they presumably were not terrorists either. But apparently it is widely believed that there are terrorists on all sides. And therefore from east to west, from west to east, from the air or from whatever provenance, the bombs continue to fall and people continue to die.

Some time ago, in this very Chamber, we quoted the lyrics of a song by Bob Dylan, that notable North American poet, in which he asks, "How many deaths will it take until [a man] knows that too many people have died?" There is a very simple formula to stop the massacre: an immediate, unconditional ceasefire. That would put an end to it. We deem the draft resolution that Egypt, New Zealand and Spain have been working on to be a useful instrument and therefore stress that we should give the people of Syria a chance through an immediate, unconditional ceasefire.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Senegal.

Whatever one's point of view on the Syrian conflict, which is entering its sixth year, one image is unavoidable: that of a country ravaged by war; a country

in ruins; a land of fire, blood and tears. The situation there is one of the worst humanitarian disasters of our time. The grim toll it is taking is unending. How many orphans, how many widows and widowers, how many elderly people and children have been abandoned to their sad fate without any assistance? How many people have been wounded or maimed for life? How many are now refugees or displaced persons? No one really knows.

What is happening in Syria is untenable. The bombs keep raining down. Meeting after meeting takes place, negotiation after negotiation is held, resolution after resolution is adopted even as human lives continue to be annihilated and homes, markets, schools and hospitals destroyed, in violation of all norms of international humanitarian law. Despite the laudable efforts of humanitarian organizations and good intentions, an entire people is dying and an entire country is crumbling, along with its economy and its centuries-old sociocultural heritage.

How much longer can this go on? Yet the cost of peace is never higher than the cost of war. That is why Senegal hopes that a negotiated solution to the crisis in Syria is still possible.

Those were the sentiments expressed by my President, Mr. Macky Sall, when he addressed the Council on 21 September, in this very Chamber, during the New Zealand presidency (see S/PV.7774). The Senegalese delegation thanks France and the United Kingdom for having taken the initiative to hold this meeting, which once again is providing us with the opportunity to consider the humanitarian situation in Syria.

The Senegalese delegation would like to reiterate its call for a cessation of hostilities and in particular for a humanitarian truce so as to allow humanitarian agencies to provide assistance to those who need it, especially in Aleppo. We would also like to recall the obligation incumbent upon all warring parties to respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law. I would like to pay tribute to members of the medical and humanitarian assistance community, who continue to risk their lives to help the Syrian people in their quest for peace and a somewhat normal life and dignity. My delegation takes this opportunity to call on the various parties to the dispute to allow humanitarian agencies proper access in order to meet the monthly humanitarian targets.

As much a priority as it might be, the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Syria is but one of the symptoms of the political crisis in Syria. We have entrusted Mr. De Mistura with the task of finding a solution to the crisis. We renew our call to members of the International Syria Support Group, especially its co-Chairs — whom we must name, the United States and the Russian Federation — to redouble their efforts to bring about a cessation of hostilities, which is the sine qua non condition for the provision of humanitarian assistance as well as the main element needed for relaunching the political process. The Council therefore ought to effectively play its due role as guarantor of international peace and security, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, by assuming its full responsibilities given the ongoing situation on the ground.

I would also like to recall the interregional initiative focused on the General Assembly — launched by Canada aimed at addressing the situation in Syria, especially in Aleppo — given the failure of the Security Council, where certain members continue to be mired in disagreement on the topic. That is why my delegation renews its support and encouragement to the three penholders — Spain, Egypt and New Zealand — in their efforts to address the humanitarian dimension of the conflict through the adoption of a draft resolution to put an end to the violence in Aleppo and by breathing new life into a cessation of hostilities throughout the entirety of Syrian territory by effectively implementing resolution 2268 (2016).

In that connection, in addition to contributing to developing practical responses to the disastrous humanitarian situation, we believe that an overarching approach to the question of Syria is more necessary than ever, including political, humanitarian, security and non-proliferation aspects. We should also focus more closely on security concerns, to include non-proliferation and the fight against terrorism, and in particular on countering terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Al-Nusra Front, so that we can get a better and more complete picture of the situation. To that end, I would reiterate our proposal for the holding of a joint briefing to look into all the mechanisms in place with regard to Syria. Whether it is held in public or private, such a briefing should be followed by closed consultations on the various views on Syria, with the aim of gleaning a clear perspective on the emergence, evolution

and the manifold implications — internal, regional and international — of the situation and to move towards finding a political solution, which is the only possible outcome.

The price of peace is never higher than the cost of war. And, as Senegalese President Sall has said, inter-Syrian peace is still possible because war cannot be the destiny of an entire people.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would first like to make a brief opening remark before reading out my statement.

We have noted that the invitees to today's meeting, who were asked to give the Security Council an assessment of what is happening in the Syrian city of Aleppo, made their briefings, respectively, from London, Geneva and Amman. Not a single of those United Nations representatives spoke from Syria, which proved an effective practice at the previous meeting (see S/PV.7817), where Ms. Elizabeth Hoff, representative of the World Health Organization, provided the Council with a great deal of information, as members will recall.

That is a very serious shortcoming, as United Nations staff in Damascus were excluded from a Security Council briefing. It is quite peculiar, in fact, and reminds us of another such instance — when three States members of the Council worked on a humanitarian draft resolution without coordinating or consulting with the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic. It is as if here in the Chamber we were recreating surrealistic scenes from the well-known novel by George Orwell *1984*, which members will all be familiar with.

Once again, the representatives and the paymasters of the Al-Nusra Front and affiliated terrorist groups have rushed to convene an emergency meeting of the Security Council in an attempt to rescue those terrorists and provide them with moral and political support against the backdrop of the victories by the Syrian Arab Army and its allies as they counter terrorism in Syria: the "moderate" terrorism and the "genetically modified" terrorism.

Before I go into the details of my statement, I would like to reaffirm to the representatives in the Council of Abu Mohammad Al-Julani, who is half-brother to Abu-Bakr Al-Baghdadi, head of the so-called Da'esh, that their continued exploitation of Syrian blood and the suffering of the Syrian people by portraying what is happening in Syria as merely a humanitarian crisis will not deter the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic from discharging its constitutional and legal obligation, supported by our allies, to combat terrorism and save Syrians from the scourge and practices of those groups, in line with the principles of international law and the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, just like any other sovereign State Member of the United Nations.

In that connection, I would like to read out for those who exploit Syrian bloodshed an excerpt from a letter written by Syrian children handed over yesterday to the UNICEF Resident Representative in Damascus. It appears that the representative of UNICEF, who is joining us via video tele-conference, has not heard of this letter, wherein children protest the terrorist attacks that target schools in Aleppo with missiles:

> "We want to go to our schools without fear of car bombs. We want to play without being suddenly shelled or bombarded. We want to live in safety, happiness, joy and peace. The blood of our beloved Syrian children who have been martyred in cities throughout the country will not have been spilled in vain — instead, it will serve as a beacon lighting the way towards an imminent victory over the forces of darkness and terrorism".

Again, that quotation is from a letter sent by the children of Aleppo to UNICEF, which I would like to draw to the attention of Mr. Cappelaere, as he is with us here today.

The representatives of the Al-Nusra Front inside and outside the Security Council will not hear the voices of those children. They will not hear the horrific stories and testimonies of tens of thousands of our people who were saved by the Syrian army and its allies in Aleppo over the past few days, or about the practices of the Al-Nusra Front and affiliated terrorist groups during the past four years. These practices lead to horrific suffering and tragedy, including selling them humanitarian assistance and bread at prices beyond their means. And it does not end with the recruitment of their children, the enslavement of their women, or their use as human shields. Those are all real stories reported by the media 24/7 and have no connection to

the tales from *One Thousand and One Nights* that some like to tell in the Council.

Incidentally, I would like to tell my colleague the representative of the United States of America that Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and all the other terrorist groups that enslave women have issued a price list for women to be sold in the slave market, with prices determined by their age. It seems that, according to that price scale, some of my female colleagues present in the Chamber would, unfortunately, sell for only $40. That is the worth of an enslaved woman — only $40.

The liberation of more than 80,000 inhabitants in Aleppo, including tens of thousands of children, was never part of the plans of the Ministries for Foreign Affairs of France, the United States or the United Kingdom, which have for years claimed that they were defending those civilians. The call by their Governments to impose sanctions on Russia and Syria, after we had liberated our Syrian civilians, proves once again that those Syrians were exploited by those who sponsor terrorism, in order to protect the terrorists of all stripes and to practice cheap political blackmail. Today hundreds of civilians who had sought to move from eastern to western Aleppo, in an attempt to flee terrorist-held areas for those protected by the Syrian army, were killed by the moderate or genetically modified terrorists who are loved by the delegations of the United Kingdom, France and the United States.

There is an elephant in the room that no one wishes to acknowledge. As Mr. De Mistura and Mr. O'Brien stated, non-State armed groups — they did not say terrorists but used the expression "non-State armed groups" — have prevented the civilians in eastern Aleppo from leaving. This means that those terrorist groups are using civilians as human shields.

The farce staged by some in the Council today through misleading statements, in line with the positions of their extortive Governments and their destructive practices, will not eclipse the sunlight or the fact that our people in certain neighbourhoods of Aleppo have regained hope and the promise of life following their liberation by the Syrian army and its allies, which have provided them with all the necessary means to live decently, including shelter, food and medicine, and they thereby now enjoying safety and stability after having suffered for more than four years.

The protagonists of this theatre of the absurd who represent the Al-Nusra Front inside the Council failed in denigrating the military achievement of the liberation of civilians in Aleppo from terrorism. They also failed in denigrating the image of the humanitarian and relief efforts on behalf of those freed from the grip of terrorism, as carried out by the Syrian Government in cooperation with its allies as friends. In that regard, I note that the Government of Syria today requested that the Office of the Resident Representative of the United Nations in Damascus — as Mr. De Mistura and Mr. O'Brien are well aware — contribute to the Government relief effort to alleviate the suffering of tens of thousands of Syrians in Aleppo, and to use the stocks contained in United Nations warehouses in Aleppo and any other assistance that would help meet the basic needs of our citizens. I would like to add that the Resident Representative will actually go to Aleppo because the Syrian Government has approved his visit there, which is scheduled for tomorrow, Thursday. We will then see what the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs can do.

I commend the efforts and achievements of the friendly Russian delegation, which has supported Syria not only in the war against terror, but in connection with various aspects of humanitarian and relief work. The latest instance was when President Vladimir Putin instructed the Russian Ministries of Defence and Emergency Situations to send mobile hospitals to provide medical assistance to the residents of Aleppo and surrounding areas. I emphasize that those are real field hospitals, and not mere studios producing fictitious stories of the so-called white-helmeted heroes founded by British intelligence James Le Mesurier, who is apparently of French ancestry, the same nationality as the person who called for this meeting.

It is time for the curtain to fall on this theatre of the absurd, which has led to the unprecedented spread of terrorism and a state of panic in world public opinion, as this terror has reached every part of the globe. These States need to realize that terrorism cannot be used as a tool to turn Aleppo into another Kandahar. That will not happen, not even in their wildest dreams — or nightmares.

It is unfortunate that the realm of such trivial political practice is not limited to the Governments of the States Members of the United Nations, but actually includes some senior Secretariat officials who have described the fate of the tens of thousands of civilians saved by the Syrian army and its allies from the grip of terrorism as being unknown and their safety undetermined. It is

as though they are hastening to support the terrorists and sending one message after another: "Continue with your moderate terrorism, and we will whitewash your record in the Security Council".

It has become a dangerous fait accompli that some in the Security Council have shirked their responsibilities to combat terrorism and maintain international peace and security, and have turned the Council into a theatre for political extortion and polarization, as it tackles the terrorist war against Syria, to the point where those States have actually obstructed the inclusion of terrorist groups in the Council's lists of such groups. As the Council knows, the latest example of that was the refusal by the United States, France and Britain to include Jaysh-e-Mohammed and Ahrar Al-Sham on those lists.

They have also shirked their responsibility for the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2253 (2015). They look the other way when other countries support terrorist groups by providing them with unlimited media exposure and financial and logistical support, in addition to takfiri Wahhabi jihadi fatwas and opening up borders to foreign terrorist fighters and weapons. All this is provided by the Al-Saud regime, the godfather of global terrorism; by the regime of Erdoğan — who is under the illusion that he is the sultan of his time — which is the real sponsor of the global "Muslim brotherhood" organization; and by the Al-Thani regime in Qatar, the main financier and sponsor of the Al-Nusra Front, whose Minister for Foreign Affairs confirmed two days ago, in a statement to Reuters, that its sheikhdom would continue to provide support for, and arms to, the terrorists in Syria even if the incoming United States Administration were to cut off its support. I conclude, obviously, with the regime of Hasaballah XIV. I will give a prize to anyone who knows who that is.

This is also in keeping with Israel's destructive role, as it provides support to terrorist organizations in the area of separation and the environs of the city of Dara'a, in particular the terrorist Al-Nusra Front. In that regard, I would like to refer to the Israeli aggression that took place last night, which was not mentioned by any of the briefers today. There was an Israeli attack late last night on Al-Sabboura in western rural Damascus. Israeli war planes fired two missiles from Lebanese airspace — a desperate attempt by the Israeli occupation to raise the morale of takfiri terrorist organizations, which are collapsing following heavy losses in many areas, in particular in the western rural areas of Damascus.

In conclusion, I again call on the fainthearted in the Security Council who continue to sympathize with the genetically modified moderate terrorists to take back the barbaric garbage that they have exported to us over the past five years. If they want them, they should care for them by setting up self-governing areas in their own cities in Europe, America and elsewhere. Take them if you want them. Take the Al-Nusra Front. Take its members. Give them entry visas and residency permits. They would be good terrorists in their countries.

My Government remains committed to its policy of balancing the priority of fighting terrorism, as the main threat to security and stability throughout Syria, on the one hand, and the pursuit of a Syrian-led political solution based on intra-Syrian dialogue, without any intervention or preconditions. Hence, the Syrian Government is still waiting for an invitation from Mr. De Mistura to resume the Syrian dialogue that he suspended in May.

The President (*spoke in French*): Before adjourning this meeting, as the Senegalese presidency of the Security Council comes to an end, I would like to correct a mistake. Earlier in the meeting I failed to thank, congratulate and encourage our briefers from this morning: Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; and Mr. Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa. Their testimony and presentations shed clear light on our work.

I am moreover particularly pleased to express the deep gratitude of the Senegalese delegation for the kind cooperation that the members of the Security Council — the permanent members and their teams — have all contributed throughout the month of November in carrying out a particularly busy programme of work. In their support, I see the expression of their ongoing commitment to peace and security around the world and the excellent relations that unite each of their countries with my own.

I would like to thank all the members of the Secretariat, starting with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon himself, the skilled technical and administrative staff of conference services, the interpreters, as well as the representatives, special envoys and security officers. I

thank in particular Ms. Hasmik Egian and the entire Security Council Affairs management team, whose professionalism and availability were exemplary from all points of view.

I must also offer my gratitude to our partners in the press, generally speaking, as well as those who are accredited to the United Nations, and more specifically to our friends at the stakeout.

As this month comes to an end, we can be pleased to have been able to bring about consensus around a number of significant issues that we have been seized of. We would not have been able to achieve that alone or without the commitment, support and agreement of every Council member. As our presidency wraps up, I know that all members would like, together with me, to wish every success to the delegation of Spain, which will assume the presidency in December.

The meeting rose at 2.15 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7823

Security Council

Distr.: General
2 December 2016

Original: English

Official communiqué of the 7823rd (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 2 December 2016, at 10 a.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record:

"On 2 December 2016, the Security Council, pursuant to annex II, sections A and B of resolution 1353 (2001), held its 7823rd meeting in private with the troop- and police-contributing countries to the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

"The President invited Ms. Nannette Ahmed, Director of Africa II Division, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, to participate in the meeting in accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

"The Security Council and the troop- and police-contributing countries heard a briefing by Ms. Ahmed.

"Members of the Council, Ms. Ahmed and representatives of participating contributing countries had an exchange of views."

16-21366 (E) 021216

Please recycle

United Nations S/PV.7824

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7824th meeting

Friday, 2 December 2016, 11 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi	(Spain)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Taula
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Ukraine	Mr. Fesko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Coleman
	Uruguay	Mrs. Carrión
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Méndez Graterol

Agenda

The situation in Liberia

Special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (S/2016/968)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council. Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-41112 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.

Expression of thanks to the outgoing President

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): As this is the first public meeting of the Security Council for the month of December, I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to His Excellency Ambassador Fodé Seck, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Senegal, for his service as President of the Council for the month of November. I am sure I speak for all the members of the Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Seck and his delegation for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Liberia

Special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (S/2016/968)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Liberia to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations; Mr. Per Thöresson, Deputy Permanent Representative of Sweden and representative of the Vice-Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission; and Ms. Victoria Wollie, National Coordinator for the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding — Women in Peacebuilding Network in Liberia.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/968, which contains the special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ladsous.

Mr. Ladsous: I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to present to the Security Council the Secretary-General's special report on Liberia (S/2016/968). I would like to begin by expressing my deep appreciation for the long-standing support that the Council has given Liberia, in particular through the deployment of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

As members are aware, the strategic assessment of Liberia is the third and final such exercise we conducted in West Africa this year, which collectively have resulted in what I think is a reshaping of the peacekeeping footprint in the region. As the report indicates, the political environment in Liberia is dominated by preparations for the presidential and legislative elections scheduled for October 2017. That should lead to the inauguration of the next President in January 2018, which will mark a historic milestone for Liberia's democracy. Peaceful and successful elections and post-election leadership transition will be key to ensuring Liberia's stability. What happens next year, therefore, will be critical. It will demonstrate whether the foundations of peace that we have been building since the conflict ended 13 years ago are strong enough to be sustained. It is incumbent upon the people and the Government of Liberia, with support from their partners, to ensure that measures are put in place now to deliver free, fair, transparent and credible elections, the outcomes of which are accepted by all.

There have been some promising developments on the political front since September, when we undertook the assessment that provided the basis for the report of the Secretary-General. At that time, an ongoing standoff within the House of Representatives had effectively stalled the legislative agenda, including reforms that were essential for sustaining peace. As it happened, however, on 5 October, the House of Representatives elected a new Speaker, who announced that he would focus on improving the relationships and coordination with Government so as to make progress on the development agenda.

On 8 November, the legislature reconvened for a one-month extraordinary session, in the midst of its annual recess, in order to advance work on critical legislation. For instance, it adopted the Land Authority Act and ratified 32 Economic Community of West African States protocols and conventions, including on democracy and good governance. The legislature also considered constitutional amendments submitted by the President more than a year ago, as well as a package of legislation on land reform, economic and financial frameworks and counter-terrorism. I think that demonstrates the commitment of elected

representatives to deliver results to their constituents. We look forward to seeing further concrete progress in advancing the legislative agenda.

There was also some realignment among the political parties. In November, three major opposition parties formed the Coalition for Democratic Change in order to challenge the ruling Unity Party in the October elections next year.

In a nutshell, Liberia remains stable. Since the conclusion of the security transition in June, there have been no serious incidents that have warranted the intervention of UNMIL. Indeed, there have been no incidents that have justified an armed response from UNMIL in the entirety of 2016. The assessment team, led by my colleague Mr. El-Ghassim Wane, was particularly impressed by the commitment and determination of the national security personnel. Despite facing serious constraints with respect to finances, logistics and basic equipment, the women and men that make up the national security personnel demonstrated resolve in performing their sovereign responsibilities of protecting the population and securing the State.

The security agencies have continued to develop. The Liberia National Police has increased its strength since the assessment was conducted. The Drug Enforcement Agency has conducted important operations in partnership with INTERPOL. The national police and immigration services are considering new legislation that, if implemented, will help consolidate professional law enforcement institutions with strong civilian oversight mechanisms to protect the public against any abuses. However, sustaining those gains that have been made will require continued and greater investment in the security sector, as well as commensurate improvements in the justice and corrections sectors.

The Government of Liberia has many priorities to address in the final year of the present Administration in order to ensure that it hands over to the next Administration a country that is truly on the path of transformation. There are many political and institutional reforms that must be adopted and implemented. Security and defence institutions require continued development. Democratic oversight mechanisms must be established and equipped to effectively perform their roles. A human rights institution must be established with an expanded mandate, which requires that there be adequate capacities and resources in order for that institution to perform its mandate. Citizens continue to expect to receive the most basic services from their Government. Let us not forget that there is a major electoral process on the horizon, which will require considerable resources.

All of those, and other, priorities must be taken forward in a very limited fiscal space. Eighty-seven per cent of the approximately $600 million national budget is earmarked for recurrent expenses. We know that the economic environment is one of complete austerity that features negligible growth projections. Since the Secretary-General's special report was published, the Government has instructed all ministries, agencies and other governmental bodies to save an additional 5 per cent from their approved budgets.

Two years ago, the Council set a deadline for the full assumption of UNMIL's security responsibilities by national institutions. That decision was a remarkable demonstration of confidence that the country had overcome the instability and dependency of the past. It was no small challenge for a fragile country that was freshly emerging from the devastation of Ebola, which the Council recognized as a threat to international peace and stability. However, the Liberian institutions rose to that challenge and met the 30 June deadline for the security transition.

After a careful assessment of the progress and remaining challenges, the Secretary-General's special report outlines three possible options regarding the future of UNMIL, taking into account the parameters provided by the Council, namely, the security situation in the country and Liberia's overall capacity to maintain stability. Those options are as follows: first, there is the option of withdrawing UNMIL and establishing a successor mission; secondly, there is the option of maintaining the status quo; and, thirdly, there is the option of continuing the drawdown of UNMIL.

Irrespective of the Council's decision, it would, in our view, be important that Liberia remain on the Council's agenda through the establishment of the next Administration. We will engage closely with that Administration in developing recommendations on the future of the engagement of the United Nations in Liberia beyond June 2018. Over the next 18 months, it will be necessary to retain a mission that is able to provide strong good offices and political support, mentoring of the security and rule-of-law institutions, as well as human rights monitoring and capacity-building. Although we have full confidence in the

ability of the national security services, we consider it essential that there remain some capacity to respond, in extremis, should there be a deterioration of stability that entails a strategic reversal.

Therefore, for each of the three options outlined in the Secretary-General's special report, a crucial aspect of our contingency planning is the quick reaction force, which is presently in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire. That unit will transfer to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali when the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire ends early next year. As the Council is aware, that unit has a mandate to provide over-the-horizon support for Liberia in support of the front-line response of the Liberian security and defence forces. The Council may also recall that part of that unit was deployed to the Central African Republic last year, where it provided remarkable and essential support during the visit of His Holiness the Pope, to Bangui, as well as in preparation of the country's presidential elections.

The assessment team also heard the call made by members of Liberian civil society that we undertake serious introspection about our failures in Liberia with a view to moving forward on the basis of mutual accountability through the elaboration of a compact, as we have just done on an experimental basis in the Central African Republic. That compact would establish a framework of mutual accountability, which would strengthen the partnership and future engagement between the Government of Liberia and the United Nations.

Throughout its history, Liberia has been a country that has demonstrated remarkable resilience and a great ability to overcome seemingly unsurmountable adversity. Liberians are a people who have endured — and are still enduring — the devastation wrought by more than a century of systemic exclusion, decades of dysfunction and 14 years of successive, brutal civil wars. Not so long ago, they were confronted with the national tragedy of Ebola for over a year. And yet, the country continues to transcend adversity. It must continue on its path of positive transformation.

The people and the Government of Liberia must take forward the essential work of building a nation — a unified, reconciled nation with an accountable Government committed to addressing corruption within its ranks; a nation where all citizens share the benefits of Liberia's abundant natural resources; a nation fully responsible for its own destiny, with institutions and a Government that provide the basic guarantees of security, protection and services to its citizens.

Clearly, we are now in the final stretch of the life cycle of UNMIL. Both the Liberians and their partners would stand to gain by ending this cycle as soon as possible so that Liberia can fully take upon itself the responsibilities of a sovereign State. But precisely because it is the final stretch, it must be handled with delicacy and prudence. We must keep in mind that the success of UNMIL will be assessed not only on the basis of the impressive results achieved in just under 13 years, but also on the way UNMIL withdraws from Liberia and, maybe above all, on the perception that the Liberians will retain after its has left.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Ladsous for his briefing.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. To that end, let me take this opportunity to remind speakers that the presidency will use the flashing lights on the collars of the microphones to prompt speakers to bring their remarks to a close. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to Mr. Thöresson.

Mr. Thöresson: I thank you, Mr. President, for the invitation to brief the Security Council on behalf of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). Let me also congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Council for the month of December.

We meet at a pivotal point in time, ahead of the Security Council's decision on the future of the United Nations peacekeeping presence in Liberia. It therefore gives me great pleasure to present the conclusions and recommendations emanating from a recent trip to Liberia and a multi-stakeholder forum on sustaining peace through transition in Liberia, hosted by the Peacebuilding Commission and the Government of Liberia.

The objective of the visit was to identify peacebuilding priorities during the transition and beyond the peacekeeping presence in the country, and to complement the atrategic assessment mission led

by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. The Chair met with the President of Liberia, several senior representatives of the Government, civil society, the United Nations leadership, members of the international community and political parties. The written report from the trip has been shared with the Security Council.

Two main questions guided the deliberations in Monrovia: first, what must be done to address remaining root causes of conflict in Liberia and, secondly, what should international support look like after the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)? Let me highlight the key conclusions.

First of all, while no one seems to believe that Liberia is facing an imminent risk of relapsing into conflict, there was general agreement that the root causes and potential triggers of conflict in Liberia remain unresolved and demand concerted attention. Reconciliation has not yet fully taken place — which was also acknowledged by the President himself. The nation has yet to address the grievances of a large marginalized majority, and must also go back to implementing the road map for national reconciliation.

Strong political leadership is required to fully and comprehensively address reconciliation in Liberia. In that connection, the need to forge a common national identity was identified and stressed repeatedly at the multi-stakeholder forum. That tells us that reconciliation in Liberia goes beyond coming to terms with what took place during the civil war. Building social cohesion requires addressing historical inequalities and unequal access to resources and power. That, in turn, relates to the need of extending State authority beyond Monrovia, providing basic social services in rural communities, forging a stronger relationship between the State and its citizens and building trust in security institutions.

It is encouraging to note some degree of progress on legislative reforms essential to peacebuilding and State-building, including those concerning land rights, decentralization and governance. However, while some progress has been made in the legislative process, certain regulations still need to be passed, and we must continue to monitor the situation. The passing of the Land Rights Act would not only address crucial property rights, but would also help reform the agricultural sector in Liberia, which is falling short of delivering on its potential. Government leadership is needed to promote structural reform as a critical preventive measure before the elections. Another message emanating from the forum is that critical gaps remain in institutional capacity. The rule of law remains weak and access to justice constitutes an ongoing challenge.

The large disenfranchised youth constitutes a real risk factor. Making jobs available for youth, engaging them and ensuring meaningful channels for participation is important — not least now in the run-up to the elections. The right support should be provided to ensure that the youth can play an active role in peacebuilding.

That leads me to another key point of discussion during the PBC visit — the presidential and legislative election in October 2017. The election was described as a defining moment for Liberia, as the first democratic transfer of power from one living president to another since it became a republic. A successful election and peaceful transition would further consolidate democracy and good governance.

As is often the case, the running of an election is fraught with the risk of tensions. More than 20 candidates are running for President. Efforts to establish solid mechanisms for dispute resolution early on, as well as drafting joint codes of conduct and managing run-offs, should be supported and prioritized. We understand that UNMIL is heavily involved in such efforts, along with the National Election Commission, both providing crucial support. Other priorities in preparing for a successful election are civic education, awareness-raising and outreach to a largely disenfranchised population. A special focus on the active participation of women is needed. Several interlocutors in Monrovia noted that it would be premature to withdraw the peacekeeping Mission before the elections. Even a smaller presence, with police contingents could play an important role.

It is important to be aware of the current socioeconomic situation in which the election and transition will take place. The Liberian economy is under considerable stress, in the aftermath of both Ebola and the downturn in prices of iron ore and rubber. Economic growth has not increased at all over the past three years, and the International Monetary Fund projection for 2016 is -0.5 per cent. That limits the fiscal space available for taking forward critical peacebuilding reforms under the current Administration. Economic growth is dependent upon economic diversification, but the foundation is weak. The economy faces huge challenges, such as the decline in Government revenue,

overreliance on concessions, social exclusion in the governance structure and the need for structural reforms to improve the business environment. During the visit, daunting statistics regarding education were presented: 63 per cent of Liberian children are not attending school. This is a key challenge today with real implications for the future.

Where does that leave us? Liberia is facing an incredibly important year in 2017, with a defining election. Many root causes remain unaddressed. After the peacekeepers withdraw, there will be residual peacebuilding tasks — some of which address root causes of conflict that remain unresolved in Liberia and require sustained international support. Those factors should be borne in mind when the future of the United Nations presence beyond December 2016 is decided. Given 13 years of massive investment in UNMIL, it will be important to ensure a responsible and careful drawdown that safeguards the gains and achievements made and sends Liberia on a stable and robust path towards the further consolidation of peace. The United Nations leadership in Monrovia still plays a key role. Preserving the function of its good offices will be useful during the period when there will be a heightened risk of tension in the lead-up and during the elections next year.

In conclusion, it is crucial to maintain international attention on Liberia at this critical time. An immediate task is to ensure that the remaining United Nations presence is set up and resourced to respond to the continuous need for peacebuilding support. The PBC therefore encourages the entire United Nations system to intensify collaborative and strategic planning, and looks forward to engaging in a regular dialogue with the stakeholders on how that is proceeding and to offer further support.

For its part, the Commission stands ready to continue its political accompaniment by ensuring continued international attention on Liberia, in the event that Liberia leaves the agenda of the Security Council, and assisting by drawing attention to gaps. The PBC is committed to making substantive contributions to the Council's deliberations, and those of us who have dual membership in the Council and the PBC will make sure to play our part in strengthening our advisory and bridging role. The PBC will also undertake continued advocacy on the importance of pursuing reforms that are central to State-building and sustainable peace in Liberia.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Thöresson for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Wollie.

Ms. Wollie: I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to address the Security Council and speak on behalf of Liberian women and women's organizations. I would like to thank the Spanish Ambassador in particular, not only for opening up this space for the voice of civil society, but for Spain's leadership in the Security Council on the women and peace and security agenda over the past two years.

Liberia is at a critical junction as the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) continues its drawdown. That coincides with the upcoming 2017 electoral processes. UNMIL played a major role in the 2005 and 2011 elections, providing up to 70 per cent of security and logistical support in many ways, such as airlifting ballot boxes where there was no road access and augmenting security.

As I speak to the Council today, I am expressing the fears of the women of Liberia regarding security and logistical gaps without UNMIL, which could present challenges that could be exploited by unscrupulous politicians to question the credibility of the elections, thereby triggering unwanted violence. On behalf of the women of Liberia, I call on the Security Council to take that into consideration when discussing the future of the United Nations presence in Liberia, especially for the 2017 election and the period immediately following.

Another major security concern for women and girls is the proliferation of illicit drugs in the country, which especially affects young people and ex-combatants. Many of those young people are involved in various crimes, such as sexual and gender-based violence, armed robbery and mob violence. That is a serious security threat as UNMIL draws down. It requires support for an effective national response to those problems, from enhancement of law enforcement capacity to better programmes for treatment and rehabilitation. Those will contribute to peace consolidation.

As the international community prepares to assist Liberia in the conduct of presidential and legislative elections, please remember that women's representation in the national legislature and in local districts is extremely low. While the lack of major security incidents is proof that UNMIL has completed its mission and can leave, please remember that sexual and

gender-based violence continues to be the number one crime reported to the police. As the report (S/2016/968) of the Secretary-General notes, in the more than 1,500 cases of rape registered in 2014 and 2015, less than 4 per cent of the alleged perpetrators were convicted, and that trend has continued in 2016.

In Liberia women and girls are victims of harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation, child marriage and abductions and forcible initiations into secret societies. As we place our hopes in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals, please remember that less than 9 per cent of Liberian girls complete secondary education, and that part of the reason for that is because they are exposed to alarming levels of violence, abuse and exploitation in schools.

Liberian women need the Peacebuilding Commission to fill any gaps left by the possible departure of the peacekeeping Mission. In the past few years, the Peacebuilding Fund has invested in the work of women's organizations in Liberia. With its support, women-led peace huts have served as a safe spaces for women and contributed to resolving local conflicts for years. We hope that that type of support will be scaled up so that women can participate in peaceful elections and help to strengthen national reconciliation, the rule of law, the security sector and an equitable management of natural resources. Those are the kinds of investments that will secure Liberia's path to peace consolidation.

With support from the Peacebuilding Fund, Liberian women, over the years, have developed the resolve to stand up for their rights, and have seen a show of solidarity in the passing of the rape law, domestic violence act and the affirmative action act. That kind of solidarity is also being exhibited as Liberian women review the 2005 manifesto and update the 2017 manifesto, identifying and making recommendations on issues that are important to women and girls in Liberia.

Increased funding to women and women civil society organizations will maximize the potential of Liberian women and the efforts being made by the international community and the Government to consolidate peace in Liberia. Inclusive community-based early-warning initiatives that engage women as early-warning monitors will enhance conflict prevention in Liberia during the transition and beyond. We can build on the Economic Community of West African States Conflict Prevention Framework, which includes the National Early Warning System and National Response Mechanism.

A landmark study that looked at 70 countries over four decades concluded that the most effective way to reduce violence against women was the strength of women's organizations or women's movement in any given country. The international community has celebrated, in this forum and many others, the heroic contribution of Liberian women to ending the civil war, helping disarm the armed groups, conduct peaceful elections, prevent a relapse into conflict and defeat the deadly Ebola epidemic. I represent those women here today. I can tell the Council that there is no more meaningful tribute to Liberian women than the long-lasting and sustained partnership of the international community. I hope that we will not be forgotten and that the Council will continue to partner with us. If we are strong, peace in Liberia will be strong.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Wollie for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the member of the Council who wishes to make a statement.

Mrs. Carrión (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Uruguay would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Ladsous for his briefing, and the Department for Peacekeeping Operations for the strategic assessment carried out in the Republic of Liberia. We are also grateful to the Vice-Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission and to Victoria Wollie.

Uruguay is troubled by the situation in Liberia, not just the current situation but also what could happen in the future with high indicators of school dropout, youth unemployment, an inefficient State aparatus and economic crisis — open wounds from the past.

The results of the strategic assessment present us with a range of options for the future regarding the presence of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). However, we understand that the challenges Liberia is currently facing will likely remain and befall UNMIL or, sooner or later, befall the presence of the United Nations. In that regard, we believe that the Government and the people of Liberia should focus efforts on building capacities to create better opportunities in the long-term with a view to building their own capacities and putting an end to their dependency position.

However, the presidential and legislative elections to be held in October constitute be a major landmark, during which time the international community will need to keep close watch over the process and be present in supporting the Liberian people. To that end, Uruguay believes it is necessary to maintain the presence of UNMIL at least until after the upcoming elections. The Mission will need to maintain some kind of structure in order to act in the event of a deterioration of the situation. For example, we are inclined towards option 3, but after Council members reviewed the Secretariat's assessment to outline a presence that would achieve peace in the country and protect, uphold and defend human rights, it would ultimately have to act in a scenario of dire or imminent instability. Therefore, it is important for the Council to continue working closely with the Swedish Ambassador as Chair of the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission to ensure the implementation of the recently adopted resolutions on the review of the peacebuilding architecture.

Finally, we believe that peace in Liberia can be achieved and sustained only through improving the institutions guaranteeing national stability with a truly inclusive process and national ownership, thereby addressing the root causes that divide the population with a view to achieving national reconciliation.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Liberia.

Mr. Brown (Liberia): I thank the Security Council for this opportunity to participate in the briefing.

Essentially, the defining question of the current engagement of the Council is how and, importantly, when can a transition from full peacekeeping operations occur so that Liberia's progress and the success achieved at such high costs in lives and treasure are not unnecessarily risked and regrettably undermined. As to the important question of how, a number of measures have been recommended by the Secretary-General in defining the possible mandate of a successor mission. The Liberian Government finds those measures to be largely favourable. In response to the critical question of when, the Liberian Government is proposing an extension through a period of one year. Only one more year to continue the phased withdrawal. One more year to enable our recovering and reforming institutions to continue to stand up as United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) draws down. One more year of the presence of UNMIL, which represents to many Liberians a brand of confidence that would assist in mitigating, if not deterring, the real risk of a disruption during the country's most sensitive political period. Only one more year of working together in what for Liberia is a successful partnership to properly prepare for a successor mission and a democratically elected Government to continue the useful partnership and build upon the progress we have already made.

We understand the many concerns associated with our request for an extension. There are concerns about increasing dependencies by national institutions on the international community. There are concerns that a request for an extension may become recurring. There are concerns that the resources contributed to UNMIL are needed elsewhere, including in more troubled spots in Africa and around the world. Those truly are reasonable concerns.

The failure of the Liberian State, which necessitated the deployment of UNMIL, also occasioned the greatest collapse in the productive capacity of any nation since the Second World War — an estimated collapse of more than 90 per cent. Corroded over time, national institutions were not simply defaced and rendered dysfunctional, they were effectively eviscerated. Dwindling public confidence was altogether lost, and hope in a democratic future was non-existent.

Of course we have come a long way, thanks to the continued support of those present. That notwithstanding, we intend to meet our target of an 8,000-strong police force, fully deployed all across the country from its current strength of 5,100, and to ensure a continuous commitment of the police and all other security institutions to training, including on the important element of safeguarding human rights and improved professional standards. The nearly 2,600 immigration officers will be further strengthened with the completion of training facilities in northern Liberia with a training capacity of 1,000 officers. And we are proud that our military is growing in professional competence with support especially from the United States and other friendly Governments, and with mentoring from Economic Community of West African States. Access to justice, which was non-existent in many parts of the country, is improving. Our security institutions are demonstrating signs of increasing readiness to stand up as UNMIL stands down.

To have UNMIL, such a confidence brand, walk with Liberia for only one more year through this last

mile is an added guarantee and priceless insurance, which completes the United Nations Mission of keeping the peace not only by the separation of belligerents, but, importantly, also through a more meaningful transformation of Liberia from a failed State to a thriving democracy.

Indeed resources are finite. And yes, there are growing needs in other parts of the world, including on the African continent, for the resources of UNMIL. We continue to consider the situation seriously and take the needed steps within the limits of our means to be removed from a dependence on UNMIL. And the truth also is that the lack of resources, or the growing need in other parts of the world for the resources of UNMIL, must necessarily compel all of us — the Liberian Government and the Security Council — to bring this successful Mission to an end in a way that may not require a return to the Security Council, nor will the Security Council perceive a reason to redeploy peacekeeping resources to Liberia in the foreseeable future. In that regard, the potential risks, especially pertaining to the conduct of unprecedented elections, to which the recent assessment report (S/2016/968) of the Secretary-General refers and the Peace Building Commission alludes, should be avoided.

Whatever decision the Council takes, the truth is that today Liberia is a better country — a more peaceful and secure nation. We intend to keep it that way. Again, we are grateful to the Security Council, the other agencies of the United Nations as well as our many bilateral and multilateral partners for their continued support. We know that, because of their priceless investments in Liberia's peace and security, today Liberians are increasingly hopeful and imbued with a growing desire and a more realistic impulse, at home and across the diaspora, to be the builders of our future and the masters of our destiny. We know we were brought to our knees by the prolonged tragedies of self-implosion. But no nation has been more desperate to recover. Again, we were recently ravaged by Ebola, and are currently shackled by an economy under severe stress. But the resiliency of our Liberian character — our will to overcome — must never be taken for granted.

Even so, Liberia cannot afford another major shock to our recovery. We simply cannot afford to ignore the possibility, however remote, of another risk to our ongoing recovery efforts. One more year is all that we believe we will need to deter the looming risk: one more year to afford a new Administration of the Liberian Government the security it would need to continue the recovery and reform processes without the baggage of an inherited sense of insecurity.

We are really at the end of a long walk together through UNMIL. We know it has been difficult, but it has been worthwhile. It has lifted spirits, rekindled hope and brought a country back from the depths of its own self-destruction. That may not have been the mandate per se, but no one can deny that this United Nations Mission has been successful. Let us now end it as sustainably, as responsibly and as successfully as we know we possibly can.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7825

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7825th meeting

Monday, 5 December 2016, 2.25 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi	(Spain)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Martins
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramirez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-41331 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 2.25 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2016/1026, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Egypt, New Zealand and Spain.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements before the voting.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The vote you have called today, Sir, on a draft resolution (S/2016/1026) on the humanitarian situation in Syria violates the Security Council's rules of procedure, since the draft resolution was put into blue only at 11.20 a.m. this morning and cannot be voted on before tomorrow morning, in accordance with the 24-hour rule. There is no consensus among Council members to waive that rule. This case is of significant importance because the additional time would have allowed Council members to take certain new circumstances into account and to reach consensus on a draft resolution that could contribute on a practical level to improving the humanitarian situation in Syria, and in particular in eastern Aleppo. Those circumstances are as follows.

On 2 December, Russian Foreign Minister Srgey Lavrov and United States Secretary of State John Kerry held negotiations in Rome. At the proposal of the American side, the outcome of those talks was an agreement to convene a meeting of experts in Geneva to resolve the issue of eastern Aleppo. We expressed our readiness to begin those discussions immediately and to hold an initial meeting on Sunday, 4 December. However, our United States partners suggested that it be postponed until Wednesday, 7 December, to which we agreed.

The proposed arrangement anticipates a full withdrawal of all fighters from the eastern neighbourhoods of the city, which conforms to the well-known initiative put forward by Staffan de Mistura. Initially, it is expected that we would agree on itineraries and timetables for their withdrawal; as soon as that takes place, a cessation of hostilities regime would enter force, allowing the fighters to be evacuated. In that way, the problem of eastern Aleppo would be effectively resolved while ensuring the security of civilians, the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance and the normalization of the situation as a whole.

The draft resolution before us refers not to a withdrawal of fighters from eastern Aleppo but to an immediate cessation of hostilities, while fighters would have 10 days to indicate whether or not they would remain a party to the cessation of hostilities. As we know, such pauses have been exploited by fighters every time to replenish their supplies and ranks. Is strengthening their control over certain quarters of the city really be worth the suffering of thousands of people?

The Russian Federation cannot support the draft resolution submitted by the humanitarian troika. We shall vote against it against it, as we honestly informed the Council in advance. Perhaps we should offer our sympathies to the humanitarian troika, which as know has been shamelessly pressured by the three Western permanent members of the Security Council yet again to put a doomed draft resolution to the vote. We believe such efforts to be provocations, undermining the efforts of the International Syria Support Group, especially in and around Aleppo.

Provocations are taking place not only here in the Security Council Chamber in New York, but also on the ground in Syria. Today, fighters shelled a medical unit of the Russian field hospital in Aleppo. A Russian nurse was killed as a result of a direct hit and a Russian pediatric doctor is fighting for his life. These people were genuinely helping Syrians, while some false guardians of humanitarian principles have all along been destroying the country, generously sponsoring terrorists and continuing to worry about their fate at any cost in order to implement their plans in the region. We caution once again that this policy is doomed.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): We have heard the representative of Russia talk about conversations with the United States. Russia says that it was on the cusp of reaching a deal with the United States to allow for some resolution of the situation in eastern Aleppo, and that the draft resolution (S/2016/1026) before us undermines the negotiation. That is a made-up alibi.

The United States, including Secretary Kerry, has continued our bilateral conversations with Russia to try to find some way to relieve the suffering around eastern Aleppo. However, we have not reached a breakthrough because Russia has been more focused on preserving its military gains than on helping Aleppo's civilians. Russia has many times before held out the vague prospect of some diplomatic deal to argue for delaying action at the Security Council. Each time Russia has followed up its promises with yet another relentless round of bombing, with horrific human consequences.

We remain directly engaged with key countries, including Russia, to address the horrific situation on the ground, but we will not let Russia string along the Security Council while waiting for a compromise from the Russians that never seems to come.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): This is not the first time we have seen this. Secretary of State John Kerry has been working with our Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, to reach a concrete result. But whenever they near an agreement, somebody undermines it. Sometimes that effort originates in Washington, D.C., from the Department of Defense or from some other American agency. Now, unfortunately, this tactic has been employed by the delegation of the United States in New York. It is most unfortunate that serious agreements are reached, and then we are told that nothing of the kind exists. There was a meeting and an agreement on new elements submitted by John Kerry, not the Russian side. Subsequently, we were told that the American representatives needed three additional days to discuss the issue, following which we were told that no agreement had been reached. I recall that, had the agreement of 12 September been implemented, it would have allowed us to address the problem in eastern Aleppo. Once again we are faced with same situation today, and we strongly deplore it.

The United States must shoulder its responsibility, which it is trying impose on others, especially in connection with resolving the problem in Syria. As co-Chair of the International Syria Support Group, the United States should show coherence in its actions, but that is not the case. We are witnessing the dramatic consequences of that lack of coherence today. Unfortunately, the United States delegation, as the members of the Security Council know, has shamelessly put pressure on the three co-sponsors of the draft resolution (S/2016/1026) to put it to the vote, knowing that it would not be adopted. That undermines the unity of the Council. There is no longer any unity between the two co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group. That represents a dangerous strategy.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now put the draft resolution to a vote.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Egypt, France, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uruguay

Against:

China, Russian Federation and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

Abstaining:

Angola

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There were 11 votes in favour, 3 votes against and 1 abstention. The draft resolution has not been adopted, owing to the negative vote of a permanent member of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make a statement following the voting.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Nearly two months ago, we met in the Security Council to debate the Syrian crisis, in particular the situation in Aleppo (see S/PV.7785). We left the Security Council Chamber carrying only messages of our continued failure with regard to the Syrian people and indications that can be explained only as lack of care with regard to Syrians and the fact that some prefer their narrow political interests over all else.

I recall now when we declared before the Council that, despite the strong polarization following the

suspension of coordination between the co-Chairs of the International Syrian Support Group and the escalation of the political and military strife among the various influential parties, we would continue to work with other members of the Council on the basis of elements that we believe reflect strong principles that take into account only Syria's interests. Indeed, we did so, over one month of difficult negotiations, based on those principles, working with Council members and in cooperation with our partners on this draft resolution (S/2016/1026), Spain and New Zealand. I am duty-bound to express to those delegations, their Permanent Representatives and their experts on Syria our sincerest thanks and appreciation. They showned a level of trust and sincerity throughout difficult negotiations.

We believed that we would be able to reach a very balanced view reflecting the principles that must not be affected by political positions. Our approach in that regard was comprehensive and took up all the issues on the ground. In our approach, we clearly called on all parties to the conflict to cease all attacks, starting in 24 hours, against Aleppo for seven consecutive days in order to allow humanitarian assistance to reach the city to save civilians, recalling that assistance had ceased in July. We also called for an immediate implementation of the components of the cessation of hostilities agreements on all Syrian territory in accordance with resolution 2268 (2016), which also calls for humanitarian assistance to be delivered to all Syrian people, in particular in besieged and not easily accessible areas.

Furthermore, we have publicly called for cessation of any cooperation between any parties and terrorist organizations that control large swathes of Syrian territory, particularly Da'esh and Jabhat Al-Nusra, now known as Jabhat Fatah Al-Sham. Cooperation by some parties with Jabhat Fatah Al-Sham/Al-Nusra began more than a year and a half ago, without any deterrent. Some groups have reached an unprecedented level of cooperation that cannot be met with silence. It is perhaps appropriate that I recall some of the sanctions that are in accordance with the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015), concerning Da'esh, Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities. It is the only Committee qualified to classify terrorists, and it continues to closely monitor those developments in order to adopt future draft resolutions on a firm basis.

I would also like to call on the International Syria Support Group to resume its work, which was initiated by our brothers in Jordan a year ago. We thank them that and for participating in the ongoing efforts.

We also call for a resumption of the political process and negotiations on the transitional period, in accordance with the communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015) as soon as possible. Let me also clearly state that it is unacceptable for those negotiations to remain suspended. It is also unacceptable for us to remain silent with respect to those who hamper those negotiations, whoever they may be.

We were determined to put this draft resolution to a vote today even though we were fully aware of the complications surrounding the positions of some Member States regarding any movement by the Security Council on the issue. That determination was not based on political interests. Rather, it is born out of the strength of our conviction that we are right. Therefore, Egypt will continue in its approach. It will continue to use its political capital with all parties, including major Powers and friendly Powers, whether they are allies or foes on the Syrian battlefield, to respond to the pleas of Syrians, regardless of their affiliations or political positions.

We are not directly party to the crisis. That does not mean that we do not care. On the contrary, we are focusing on settling the crisis, not on fuelling it or benefiting from it. I would like to call on the conscience of the parties to the conflict — those in the country and those with regional or international connections. What you are fighting for in Syria — does it really justify having to see mothers and fathers holding their dying children? What is the victory you seek? What is the aspiration that requires millions of Syrians to seek refuge and mercy from strangers? What religion, what sect can still justify this level of bloodshed?

I would also like to address the Syrian people in all of their communities and faiths — whether Arab, Kurd, Druze, Yazidi, Muslims, Christians, Sunni, Shia or Alawi. Yes, we have been unable to impose a settlement or quick change of the situation on the ground that would immediately erase their tragedy. However, we have intent and perseverance. More important, we have goodwill and good intentions. What we want is to stand with Syrians, shoulder to shoulder, with every political tool at our disposal until a final settlement is reached and the aspirations of Syrians to freedom

and democracy in a united, sovereign State, safe from extremism and terrorism, are achieved. We make a promise to Syrians that we shall continue on a straight path that is dictated only by our humane conscience towards a brotherly people. We promise to fight any attempts to fuel the conflict.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): New Zealand is bitterly disappointed that the Security Council was not able to come together today to adopt the draft resolution contained in document S/2016/1026.

The draft resolution, put forward by Egypt, Spain and New Zealand, represented only a small step. In our view, it was the minimum required for a credible response from the Security Council to address the situation in Aleppo and in the rest of Syria. It was a humanitarian draft resolution designed to reduce fighting and get aid to those civilians who most desperately need it. As is well known, New Zealand has been working towards such an outcome for many months. The Council's failure to act in spite of the graphic monthly briefings and increasingly urgent pleas from Staffan de Mistura, Stephen O'Brien and others is deeply damaging to the Council's reputation, and catastrophic for the people of Syria.

As I said last week (see S/PV.7822), our objectives in presenting this draft resolution are those that have guided our engagement on Syria since joining the Council, and that led my Prime Minister to convene a high-level meeting in September (see S/PV.7775). Those objectives were and are to reduce the violence, to restore the ceasefire, to allow humanitarian assistance to reach those in need and to create space for the resumption of political talks.

Egypt, Spain and New Zealand had been working on this draft resolution for over a month. We consulted extensively and took on board as many views as would allow us, or so we understood, to achieve consensus while still making a practical difference for Syrian civilians on the ground. I would note that the delegation with which we engaged most intensively and from which we took the greatest number of changes was the delegation of the Russian Federation. We circulated the latest draft text to all Council members and requested the Secretariat to put it in blue at 8 p.m. on Friday, 2 December. That request was circulated to all Council members. It is deeply disappointing that a trivial procedural point should be advanced as a serious argument for delaying such a draft resolution as this, against that practical background.

Today's veto is another indictment on Russia, on those that supported Russia and on the Council. Today's veto demonstrates to the world that for Moscow and Damascus our common refrain — that there is no military solution to this conflict — is a hollow fiction. For those countries it is clear that a military victory is precisely what they want and are actively pursuing, even if its cost is continued carnage inflicted on the Syrian people.

Putting aside the devastating outcome of today's vote for the Council's credibility, we must not lose sight of the fact that the biggest losers today are those on the ground who, instead of having a chance to restore small parts of their lives, will continue to be subjected to the bombing and blasting that have blighted their lives for so many years. However, we will not let today's great disappointment deter us. New Zealand will continue to work in the Security Council, in the General Assembly and elsewhere to continue trying to protect Syrian civilians.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): We deeply regret that the draft resolution (S/2016/1026) submitted by Egypt, Spain and New Zealand could not be adopted. Given the extremely grave situation in Syria, it was and is the responsibility of the members of the Security Council to give their unreserved support to everything that would enable us to save lives. That is what France did today, alongside the large majority of the members of the Council, aware of the overwhelming responsibility that we have to maintain international peace and security.

The draft text submitted to us was not, by definition, perfect. It was the result of compromise. However, had it been adopted, it would have reconstituted a fragile ray of hope, admittedly partial and late in arrival, that would have allowed us to work, and work together, to save lives, put an end to the tragedy of Aleppo and seek the conditions for a political solution.

In demanding a total halt to attacks for a renewable seven-day period so as to allow humanitarian actors to meet the urgent needs in eastern Aleppo, we were not asking for a concession. It was the minimal response to the repeated demands from the United Nations and humanitarian actors, which for months have been relayed by members of the Council, beginning with France. It was the minimal delay necessary to

allow access for humanitarian assistance and medical evacuations under the responsibility of the United Nations, in accordance — it should be recalled — with obligations under international humanitarian law. We were only demanding that the regime and those who support it finally conform to the obligations that they have under international humanitarian law.

By delaying the negotiations as long as possible, and then opposing a very moderate draft text, Russia chose to remain deaf to the appeals of the international community and to continue its support, with that of Iran, for the efforts of the Syrian regime seeking to take Aleppo regardless of the human cost. That is the meaning of those successive vetoes.

Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, France has defended an unchanging position, that is, the primacy of a negotiated solution, given that a military solution is impossible, as only a political solution will allow us to meet the aspirations of the Syrian people, ensure lasting peace and combat terrorism. France is convinced that the headlong military rush by the regime and its supporters is not simply a moral fault but also a strategic error — a strategic error that, beyond Syria, endangers the international community as a whole. Without a political solution, Syria will remain what it is today: a devastated and divided country, prey to incessant fighting and the foremost bastion of international terrorism.

However, France is not resigned to the deadlock that we see here again today. As I have said, the only solution to the Syrian conflict is political. Nothing will cause France to deviate from that conviction. Nothing will make us deviate from the road map that was agreed to by the international community — a political solution based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015), with the establishment of a transition authority having full executive power. That is not an ideological position; it is the only possible solution imposed by the reality in Syria.

We have noted that the limited-format discussions in Lausanne and Geneva have not made it possible to halt the current offensive. For that reason, France calls for the immediate relaunching of a credible and inclusive international dialogue that brings together all actors involved in the Syrian conflict to save the martyred population of Aleppo from destruction. France hopes that the initiative brought by Canada to the General Assembly demanding the stopping of all attacks can be carried out.

In such dark hours for Aleppo and Syria, which, if we are not mistaken, challenge the credibility of the Council, we have no right to give up. We have the moral and political obligation to take action, and therefore to come together to put an end to the tragedy in Aleppo and seek the conditions for a political solution, which, once again, is the only possible solution to the Syrian tragedy. That will be the essence behind all of France's efforts.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): Just five days ago I sat in this Chamber (see S/PV.7822) and asked what it would take to stop the horror in Aleppo. Today Russia and its small number of followers have shown that they have no interest — none whatsoever — in answering that question. Instead, for the sixth time in five years, they have chosen to block meaningful action and hold the Security Council to ransom. In doing so, and much more tragically, they have also held to ransom the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children currently enduring hell in Aleppo.

They will claim that we made them veto, that there was not enough time for proper consultations, that we forced them to a vote for political reasons. Those are hackneyed excuses. The draft resolution (S/2016/1026) was first circulated over a month ago. And yet for most of that time Russia simply refused to engage, more content to support Al-Assad's onslaught against Aleppo than to negotiate with fellow members of the Security Council.

Let me pay tribute to the work of Egypt, New Zealand and Spain in seeking consensus on such a sensitive issue. They left no stone unturned, reaching out in particular to the Russian delegation. They put their first draft into blue a week ago.They amended it to take into account Russian views, and they put their final version into blue on Friday. And that is the version in blue that we have in front of us, dated 2 December. I therefore urge all delegations to avoid hiding behind hypocritical, bogus procedural arguments.

China's veto is particularly surprising. Despite repeated pronouncements against politicization and in favour of dialogue, China has chosen to side with Russia — a party to the conflict. Put simply, they have chosen to veto not because of a lack of consultation, but because of their long-standing, misplaced faith in a despot who has killed nearly half a million of his own people, who has sanctioned the murder of civilians as

they flee the bombed-out ruins of Aleppo — a despot who would rather reduce Syria to rubble than to negotiate an overdue peace.

I could go on, but instead let me ask Russia another question. What did it seek to achieve today? For the past 71 years, the Council has been responsible for maintaining international peace and security. Each and every one of us in the Chamber has committed to upholding that responsibility. And yet, through its veto today, Russia has once again blocked meaningful, credible action — action that could have fulfilled our collective responsibility. How does that veto serve international peace and security? How is it in keeping with the principles that we are all here to uphold?

Russia claims it is fighting terrorism and that its veto today is in pursuit of ridding Syria of extremists. That is pure fantasy. Blocking a seven-day ceasefire — a ceasefire that would have let aid in, that would have fed starving children — is not fighting terrorism. Continuing the indiscriminate bombing of civilians and attacking medical facilities is not fighting terrorism. Supporting a regime that uses chemical weapons and carries out war crimes is not fighting terrorism. Russia will claim that its intent is decent — humanitarian, even. But that misses the point. Many Council members have pledged generous amounts — the United Kingdom has allocated $900 million. But we all know that that money counts for so little when humanitarian aid cannot even get in. And we all know who is obstructing the United Nations and its humanitarian partners. We all know who is using starve-or-surrender tactics, and who is bombing civilians into submission.

Even if Russia will not use its influence to stop the bombing or permit humanitarian aid to be delivered, it is not too late for Russia and the regime to prevent even worse atrocities. Russia can still ensure the protection of civilians leaving eastern Aleppo. Russia can still enable the United Nations to protect those fleeing and allow the United Nations to have a role in planning evacuations.

The world and the Syrian people will not forget Russia's role in carrying out, and supporting the regime in carrying out, such heinous crimes in Syria. Look again at the faces of those left starving, bleeding and dying in Aleppo. They are not terrorists. Look again and change course. We had a chance today to help those people, to stop the bombing and let aid in. We have once again failed, but we must keep trying until we succeed.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I will be very brief. My delegation voted in favour of a draft resolution (S/2016/1026) that we thought was highly inadequate. Uruguay understands that the solution to the crisis in Syria requires an immediate and unconditional ceasefire throughout the country. The draft resolution was very far from what we would have liked to have seen. Nevertheless, we could not vote against it because at least it could achieve a pause in the massacre. As for abstaining, there is no option between saving lives and continuing with the massacre. Therefore, we voted with full conviction for a draft resolution that I must say it is inadequate.

I have no doubt that currently in Syria very few people are worried about what time the text was put in blue and, for that matter, most certainly they will not understand how we could be worried about something to that effect. But in any case, what is very serious is that the Security Council continues to be unable to fulfil its role. We can ask ourselves what was the use of this meeting. Somehow, it might remind us of the Gabriel García Márquez novel *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, in which everyone knew that Santiago Nasar would be killed that day by the Vicario brothers but no one did anything to prevent it.

I believe that the difference here is that many have been working in search of consensus, although that continues to escape us. But I think that we must be persistent in our efforts to ensure that the solution to the crisis in Syria be a political one and not military — a solution that includes Syrians and is led by them. Certainly, it must be a solution in which the numerous terrorist groups that are constantly obstructing the pursuit of a solution are excluded from the political landscape.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Recently, the conflict in Syria has continued to escalate, causing a serious deterioration of the humanitarian situation in some areas and plunging the Syrian people into deep suffering. China expresses its deep concern about the situation in Syria and feels for the Syrian people in their suffering in the conflict. Under the current circumstances, it is all the more necessary for the international community to remain committed to the political settlement of the question of Syria. It must work together to push the Syrian issue back on the track of seeking a solution through peaceful negotiations and dialogue and to find a fundamental way out of the conflict as soon as possible.

Security Council action on the question of Syria should be conducive to the work on the four tracks, namely, a resumption of the ceasefire, political peace talks, cooperation on counter-terrorism, and humanitarian relief. The situation in Syria is complex, sensitive and grave. The parties concerned, such as the Russian Federation and the United States, are making diplomatic efforts to ease of the situation in Syria. The Security Council's actions should support and cooperate with the those diplomatic initiatives.

The draft resolution (S/2016/1026) that the Security Council just voted on includes concrete measures for easing the humanitarian situation in Syria. Council members, including the co-penholders, made great efforts to seek consensus. Those efforts could have continued so that the Council could speak with one voice to the outside world and avoid the politicization of the humanitarian issue. Action on the draft resolution while there were still serious differences was not conducive to the diplomatic efforts by the countries concerned, nor is it helpful for improving the situation in Syria. The situation in Syria is the result of multiple overlapping factors. The only way is take an integrated approach to seek a comprehensive, fair and appropriate settlement.

The international community needs to work together to ease the humanitarian situation in Syria. It equally needs to set its sight on the overall situation and continue to support the United Nations role as the main channel of mediation and push the Syrian parties to find an agreement that is acceptable to everyone through peaceful negotiations, under the principle of being Syrian-owned and Syrian-led. The Security Council should maintain unity on the question of Syria and speak with one voice. It must work together to play a constructive role for an early political settlement of the question of Syria.

Finally, I would like to ask the representative of the United Kingdom what right he has to distort the position of other countries. The Security Council is a solemn forum; it is not a place where groundless attacks can be made against the serious positions of other countries. Taking a responsible approach and abiding by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations are the minimum requirements for each and every Member State when participating in the Council's work. I would like to request that the United Kingdom representative put an end to such a practice of poisoning the atmosphere of the Security Council and abusing the solemn forum of the Council. Today is not the first time he has done that, and I hope that such abuse will not be repeated in the future.

Mr. Ramirez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela once again expresses its concern about the horrendous armed conflict that has caused a blood bath in Syria, and in particular about the suffering among civilians. We condemn the indiscriminate attacks, irrespective of who carries them out, against the civilian population and humanitarian actors, such as the bombing of hospitals and health centres and the practice of besieging civilians. In that connection, we condemn the recent attacks perpetrated by armed groups of the so-called moderate opposition against a Russian field hospital and its humanitarian personnel, killing two Russian health professionals.

Our country voted against the draft resolution (S/2012/1026) on the situation in eastern Aleppo because we believe that the text does not appropriately reflect the situation on the ground, in particular the threat represented by the Al-Nusra Front and its associated groups in the eastern part of Aleppo. We regret that since the beginning of the armed conflict, five years ago, some members of the Security Council, which are directly involved in the gruelling war, have continued to impose their own particular geopolitical agenda to the detriment of the people of Syria and the objective treatment of the humanitarian situation.

Unfortunately, the humanitarian dimension has been politicized anew, and the justifications and ingredients that triggered and fuelled the tragedy are again being ignored. In Syria, a terrible war has been imposed, and some countries have unflaggingly supported terrorist groups, the executioners of the Syrian people. The perpetrators of this horror even speak out against and offend those countries in the Security Council that do not give the green light to their continued aggression against Syria. I therefore fully support the views expressed by the Permanent Representative of China.

As we said on 8 October (see S/PV.7785), the fight against terrorism being conducted jointly by the Governments of Syria and Russia is the most effective way to protect the Syrian population from the terror and death that the terrorists are carrying out in the territories under their control in eastern Aleppo. A genuine threat exists in that region and is reflected by the thousands of fighters of the Al-Nusra Front and other

terrorist groups that are holding hostage the thousands of civilians living there and using them as human shields — all in breach of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. This type of fighting by terrorist groups can be seen on all fronts in the battle, including currently in Mosul. This terrorist tactic cannot be used to inhibit a frontal attack on the scourge of terrorism.

The purpose of today's draft resolution was not to assist the people of Aleppo who are suffering the onslaught of war. Rather, it gave propaganda treatment to the humanitarian issue in order to frustrate the Russian Federation in its efforts to combat terrorism. Today, by voting on the draft, the Security Council, despite the views of several of its members, demonstrated its lack of unity on this issue, which is detrimental to finding a political solution to the conflict. Had there been a genuine interest in coming up with a compromise draft resolution, as was done in resolution 2319 (2016) on the renewal of the mandate of the Joint Investigation Mechanism, the Security Council would have been in a position to adopt a draft resolution that might have dealt with the complex situation on the ground. Today's vote is unfortunate, particularly when diplomatic efforts are being made in Geneva between the co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group. We demand that the diplomatic path be followed.

It is also necessary to bear in mind that the Syrian Government has the full right to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity when threatened with terrorism from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Al-Nusra Front. Further, we should also keep in mind that the military operations under way in coordination with Russia are aimed at retaking the territory occupied by these terrorist groups. It is therefore a matter of maintaining territorial unity and political independence of the nation, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

In the fight against these terrorist groups, it is clear that the full commitment and efforts of the Syrian Government to protect its own people from terrorist barbarism have been handicapped by external forces that have pledged to defeat the legitimate authorities of the country. For us, it is remarkable how the civilians of eastern Aleppo are fleeing terrorists who are trying to use them as human shields, and trying to reach Government-controlled territory where they find safety and humanitarian assistance.

In eastern Aleppo, terrorist groups are using these people as human shields, as the Islamic State has done in areas that it controls. It is using humanitarian aid for its own purposes rather than the undoing the tragedy that it represents for the Syrian people. We have insisted that the so-called moderate opposition be separated from Al-Qaida and the Al-Nusra Front in order to show its true intentions with regard to achieving peace through political negotiations. The opposition needs to join the fight against terrorism and cease to be part of the scourge as it has unfortunately been until now.

Of course, the solution to the conflict is not military one but political. That does not mean, however, that the Syrian Government relinquishes its responsibility to protect the people from terrorism and defend its own territory. We once again support the Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, with a view to achieving a peaceful and political solution to the conflict. We call on the parties to commit themselves decisively to advancing the shared goal of peace and stability in this country, beginning with an effective withdrawal of all fighters in eastern Aleppo.

Finally, we support a negotiated and political settlement of this terrible crisis. Foreign interference in Syria must cease. The Syrian people are paying a very high price in defending its integrity and sovereignty and in defeating terrorism. The international community, and particularly the Security Council, must reach consensus and take constructive steps in order to stop the violence and re-establish peace.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): Malaysia has repeatedly called for the Security Council to act more decisively on Syria. We therefore view this latest effort by Egypt, New Zealand and Spain as an attempt to assert the Council's authority and discharge its responsibility to effectively address the deteriorating situation in Syria, particularly in Aleppo.

The fulfilment of the draft resolution's (S/2016/1026) main objective, which was to achieve a ceasefire in Aleppo to allow for the delivery of much-needed humanitarian assistance, is absolutely critical for reducing death and destruction and for saving thousands of lives in the besieged city, especially women and children. Also of utmost importance to my delegation is the fate of thousands who are facing the great risk of mass starvation. An urgent need for the activation of the United Nations four-point humanitarian plan to resupply medical and food assistance needs no further

elaboration, and the presence of medical personnel to treat the many sick and wounded is urgently needed.

Given the compelling humanitarian reasons behind it, my delegation voted in favour of the draft resolution. We have consistently pressed for alleviating the appalling humanitarian situation being faced by innocent civilians in Syria. We are therefore gravely disappointed that this draft humanitarian resolution failed to be adopted. It is a betrayal of all hopes pinned on the Council to alleviate the dreadful suffering caused by a brutal conflict.

We have spent hours listening to the heart-wrenching accounts of a humanitarian catastrophe, and with the Security Council's inability to act, do we have the heart to listen to more graphic briefings? What is required is actions to halt the fighting in order to pave the way for the delivery of the humanitarian assistance that the people of Syria are so desperately missing.

For the sake of these innocent lives we will not give up hope. We cannot despair. We will continue to support any initiative, be it in the Security Council or outside the Council, to see an end to the brutal conflict and destruction in eastern Aleppo.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): Ukraine commends the dedicated efforts of the delegations of Spain, New Zealand and Egypt. Ukraine voted in favour of the draft resolution (S/2016/1026), since we wholeheartedly hoped that it would have served the purpose of breaking the dangerous pattern of escalation in Syria and contribute to easing the continued intense suffering inflicted on the Syrian people. The draft resolution presented a rare if pale glimmer of hope in the otherwise gloomy environment around the Syrian issue in the Security Council.

It is exactly for that reason that we are extremely dismayed, but not surprised, by the fact that all these efforts were, in the end, derailed once again by the Russian Federation. It is a terrible shame to talk about procedures as if they are more important than the principles of the Organization and the Security Council, let alone the wasted lives of increasing numbers of innocent people in Aleppo.

If the draft resolution had seen the light of day and were adopted, it would have been a small yet meaningful step towards exercising the collective responsibility of the Council. It would have helped to prevent what has already become one of the gravest humanitarian tragedies of modern times. It is utterly frustrating that the counter-terrorism narrative will continue to be used by Russia as an alibi for bombardments of opposition forces and civilians in Aleppo and elsewhere. History will hold accountable those who did not let the Council discharge its duties.

We once again stress the urgent need for the United Nations to look into the alarming reports of the extensive use of incendiary weapons as well as of other indiscriminate weapons, including bunker-buster bombs. We firmly insist that those responsible for committing crimes against humanity, war crimes and other grave violations of international humanitarian law should be brought to account. I am sure that they will.

Let us also convey once again a clear message to those planning a retake of eastern Aleppo. The idea that a regime victory would lead to an enforced stability in Syria is a dangerous fantasy. What we are witnessing is turning Aleppo into another Grozny, and a Grozny scenario in Syria is possible but will never be sustainable; there is no military solution to this conflict.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): Abu Jaafar, a coroner in eastern Aleppo, recently told a reporter,

> "You know, it is not our job to bury people, but if we do not, no one else will. Where we used to bury one man, we now lay down entire families. We dig and we dig; it never ends".

We dig and we dig; it never ends. Today we had a chance not to end but to briefly stop the ongoing butchery in eastern Aleppo. We have failed because of a cynical act. With a wave of their hands, Russia, China and Venezuela showed that they do not want the suffering of eastern Aleppo to end. They have heard the cries of people who are pleading for their lives, people cowering in the basements of their ruined homes, people who are picking through trash to find a morsel to eat, and they said, "No, the Security Council cannot help you". Russia, together with its ally, Bashar Al-Assad, will keep bombing these people instead.

Today we will hear a lot of words from Russia; we have heard a lot already. But it is Russia's action using its veto to block a brief humanitarian pause that speaks volumes today. The raised hands that blocked today's draft resolution (S/2016/1026) to aid suffering civilians shows us everything we need to know about Russia's intentions in Syria, and Russia has no one to blame for its veto today except itself.

If it had been adopted and implemented, the draft resolution that Russia and China vetoed today would have established a seven-day pause in the fighting in eastern Aleppo. That pause would have allowed life-saving humanitarian aid to get into eastern Aleppo and allowed civilians who wished to escape to leave. This was no political draft resolution. Its purpose was, in fact, quite simple: stop the bombing, stop the shelling and get people help.

It probably should not even have been necessary to propose this draft resolution. After all, the Council has long demanded that the regime enable immediate and unhindered humanitarian assistance, and, of course, international humanitarian law requires that civilians not be targeted. The situation in eastern Aleppo is so dire that the Council has to demand that the parties respect the norms that all of us know should apply. Let me tell the Council what Russia and China have vetoed today in blocking this draft resolution and allowing the bombardment of eastern Aleppo to continue. They have vetoed the delivery of basic medicine to people who will die without it. They have vetoed the evacuation of sick and dying people who have no chance of surviving in the bombed-out hospitals and clinics of eastern Aleppo. The have vetoed the delivery of food to civilians who could starve to death and, in the case of vulnerable children, suffer lifelong effects from severe malnutrition. They have vetoed the lives of innocent Syrians. This action is a death sentence for innocent men, women and children.

We had no illusions about today's draft resolution offering a lasting solution to the fighting in Aleppo, much less in all of Syria. But if implemented, it unquestionably would have saved the lives of Syrian civilians. It would have eased their suffering, if only for a week, and it just might have created space for other, more durable solutions to emerge beyond a brief pause in the killing. Because of today's vetoes, now we have none of that.

So Syrians trapped in eastern Aleppo will continue to have to choose between two hells: stay put and be barrel-bombed, starved and mortared to death, or try to escape and risk being bombed or picked off by snipers on the journey or tortured or disappeared by regime forces.

Let me share what just one resident of Eastern Aleppo faced this past week. Modar Shekho is an emergency nurse. His brother was killed last Sunday, reportedly by an artillery strike. Modar's father then went out to search for a place to bury his son. As the father searched, he, too, was killed, hit by an airstrike. So Modar lost his brother and his father. Think about that: parents being killed as they look for places to bury their children. And finding places to bury the dead in eastern Aleppo is getting harder and harder. Cemeteries are full; they have been full for a long time now. People have started to dig shallow graves in public parks, rushing to dig so as to avoid the fate of Modar's father. They have even stopped burying loved ones in the daytime; it is simply too dangerous.

Russia and China's vetoes mean that we on the Council have failed to stop this destruction. History will remember that Russia once again, together with China and Venezuela, thwarted the Council's efforts to act to help the Syrian people for the second time in as many months.

The United States recognizes New Zealand and Spain for their tireless efforts to find a way here in the Security Council to stop the fighting in eastern Aleppo. We also greatly appreciate Egypt's leadership in preparing and advocating for this draft resolution for weeks and for speaking on behalf of the countries in the region most directly affected by the conflict to demand a halt to Russia and the Al-Assad's regime's brutal campaign, calls that Russia has blatantly defied in vetoing this draft resolution.

But in the face of this callous act, we must not give up. The civilians of eastern Aleppo cannot stop the bombs from falling on them or get their hands on the food and medicine they need to survive; but we who are not trapped there do have that power. So while Russia has taken advantage of its permanent seat on the Council to block today's draft resolution, the rest of us have an obligation to continue to search for other ways to pressure Russia and the Al-Assad regime to stop this devastating assault. And each time an approach comes up short, we must be willing to try another strategy to end the carnage. We can all fight harder and dig deeper to make sure that Russia never evades scrutiny for its actions in Syria, to make sure that we are never silent in the face of these atrocities and to make sure that we apply maximum pressure to bring this barbaric military campaign to a halt.

Mr. Okamura (Japan): Japan supported the draft resolution (S/2016/1026) proposed by the three co-penholders — Egypt, New Zealand and

Spain — because we believe that it could have served as a tool to meet the pressing humanitarian needs in Aleppo and elsewhere in Syria. As Japan has often emphasized, our most important priority is to take action that improves the situation on the ground, regardless of the ongoing political impasse.

It is deeply regrettable that the Security Council has once again failed to overcome its differences. The Council is ultimately responsible for addressing the devastating humanitarian situation in Syria. We have worked hard, and we are close to reaching an agreement on how to alleviate the protracted suffering of the Syrian people. I sincerely urge all Council members not to abandon our collective and individual efforts, and to resume our discussions immediately after today's meeting.

Mr. Gaspar Martins (Angola): Regrettably, we felt compelled to abstain in the voting on today's draft resolution (S/2016/1026), which, if it had been negotiated with the sole objective of saving Syrian lives in mind, would have been adopted by consensus. A resolution designed to stop the bombing for 24 or 48 hours, or even seven days, only for it to be resumed immediately afterwards, is not what is required of the Council. Our consultations clearly pointed to the outcome we have just reached — a draft resolution that could not be adopted, since we did not reach a consensus. Angola has worked consistently to try to enable the Council to reach a consensus and will continue to do so. We should stand united in the face of a situation such as the one in Syria. I would like to make it clear that Angola will continue to be engaged in the search for a solution that can save lives in Syria by stopping the bombing and ending the war that continues to make victims of so many.

We need a lasting peace in Syria, not just in Aleppo, and I am sure that if the Council continues to act as it should — in unity, and with a clear goal — we should be able to reach that goal, as we have done in adopting previous resolutions on Syria.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): In deciding to vote in favour of the draft resolution (S/2016/1026) on the humanitarian situation in Syria introduced by its three co-authors, Egypt, New Zealand and Spain, the delegation of Senegal wanted to echo the numerous appeals and warnings made to the Council, including in this Chamber itself, to act without delay in order to prevent the city of Aleppo, and its eastern districts in particular, from becoming an unprecedentedly terrible tragedy before the helpless gaze of the international community.

Beyond the issue of Aleppo, what we are really talking about is breathing new life into the ceasefire throughout Syria by implementing resolution 2268 (2016) effectively, so as to ensure access for humanitarian assistance and the evacuation of those who are injured or vulnerable. We are also talking about finding the means to combat terrorism more effectively within the framework of a comprehensive strategy that respects international humanitarian law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. For all those reasons, my delegation reiterates its call on the International Syria Support Group, particularly its two co-Chairs, to make every effort to arrive at an effective, lasting truce that can give every chance to a credible political process under the auspices of the United Nations on the basis of the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 and resolution 2254 (2015).

It is by coming together around the goal of peace and stability in Syria that we will succeed in effectively combating terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State and Jabhat Fatah Al-Sham, formerly the Al-Nusra Front, which are unquestionably our common enemies.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

We deeply regret the vetos of today's draft resolution (S/2016/1026), introduced by Spain, Egypt and New Zealand. Spain believes that its text, which is not perfect and undoubtedly comes too late for the thousands of lives that have been lost already, would have made it possible to protect the civilian population of Aleppo from the worst consequences of the war in Syria and to re-establish the cessation of hostilities throughout the country.

As divided as the Council is with respect to how to respond to the conflict, it has continued to shoulder the responsibility conferred on it by the Charter of the United Nations. If peace cannot be maintained, we should at least be able to maintain respect for international humanitarian law, which prohibits attacks on civilians and requires the regular provision of humanitarian aid. Spain, Egypt and New Zealand share duties as rapporteurs on the humanitarian situation in Syria. Over the past two years, we have often been tempted to urge a response to the problems in Syria in the Security Council, but have refrained in order to

avoid divisiveness and interference in the negotiations being conducted in other forums. We have crafted more than one draft resolution that has not seen the light of the day and have also participated in initiatives that ran the risk of creating conflict within the Security Council. This time, however, we could no longer stay silent, considering that the General Assembly will be holding a meeting in three days in order to debate a draft resolution demanding that the Council take action on the grave situation in Syria.

As my colleagues from Egypt and New Zealand have recalled, we convened an initial round of negotiations on today's draft resolution on 3 November. Despite the desperate situation of Syria's civilian population, we set aside enough time to help us work to reach a consensus. We have striven to find language that could bring together positions that were very different, included some that were fully opposed. We have incorporated suggestions from every delegation that wanted to contribute to drafting the text. We have done everything possible — indeed, perhaps, sometimes the impossible — to reach an agreement. We are sorry that our efforts have not produced results, but we do believe it was our duty to try.

The year 2016 is the four hundredth anniversary of the death of Cervantes, the author of *Don Quixote*, who will always be remembered for his impossible dream of becoming a knight errant. With today's veto of our draft resolution, the Spanish delegation has awoken from its dream, but we will not give up. I would like to conclude by expressing our gratitude to the delegations of Egypt and New Zealand, which have shared with us our frustrated attempt to tackle the conflict in Syria. It has been an honour to work with both of them.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

The representative of China has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Security Council has very important work to do, and I do not want to take up any more of members' time. However, with regard to the statement made by the United States representative, I would like to emphasize one point.

How did the situation in Syria come about, and how did the problems that other countries in the Middle East are dealing with reach the point where they are today? Where did they begin, and why? What has been the role played by the various countries concerned? The historical record is very clear. Every member of the Council is very well aware of that. It cannot be changed by distorting the positions of some countries on the Council. I have already explained China's position and do not want to repeat myself.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): As far as I am concerned, the discussion ended somewhat unexpectedly for me when you took the floor in your national capacity, Sir. I wanted to say a few words after the voting as well. I will be brief, since we have discussed the situation in Syria many times, including just recently. We have already stated our position.

Some rhetorical, perhaps even polemical, questions were asked with regard to what Russia is trying to achieve. I will tell the Council what Russia is trying to achieve: Russia is attempting to find a solution — including through the Security Council — that would have a chance at success.

The initiative that Mr. Sergey Lavrov and Secretary of State John Kerry discussed two days ago has a chance to succeed because it would lead to an effective end to the tragedy in Aleppo, which has lasted for many years — both in eastern and western Aleppo, which is actually one huge area with ongoing military activities.

I regret that the representative of the United States was so aggressive in her statement. Once again, it was clear from her statement that the delegation of the United States is somehow trying to disavow the initiative of Secretary of Statey Kerry. I hope that the Secretary of State will find the strenght to pursue this initiative, because it could lead to an effective and lasting solution.

I would like to say just a few words on the statement made by the representative of Ukraine. I thought it quite curious that the criticism that the representative of Ukraine tried to direct at Damascus could also be levelled at Kyiv, word for word, with its anti-terrorist operation in the Donbas region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): I apologize for taking the floor again but I must make a few comments on the illusion under which the delegation of the United States is operating with regard to my country's vote.

First of all, as the Ambassador of China stated so eloquently, I would like to recall the high level of responsibility that the United States shoulders in the origin and subsequent developments of a conflict whose consequences we are seeing in Syria. Interventionist policies in the Middle East — in Iraq, Libya and Syria — are among the main causes of the emergence of terrorism and the destabilization of institutions and States in North Africa.

No institution has been able to address terrorism because armies and other State institutions have been destroyed. In that regard, for a State to invoke the humanitarian situation that it has caused itself is an act of political cynicism. As a country elected by the General Assembly to be a non-permanent member of the Security Council, Venezuela is responsible for superimposing the elements of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations on any national or geopolitical interest. For that reason, in all of our resolutions and actions, we have firmly supported the principles of the United Nations to counter foreign interference, defend sovereignty and support peace. We do so without employing double standards or preconditions and we do so in all circumstances.

President Obama has acknowledged his mistakes. He announced them publicly when referring to the intervention in Libya. North American domestic political debate makes many references to the mistakes made in Iraq and Syria. What is regrettable about the entire situation is that in spite of this ongoing debate on Syria here in the Security Council, it is the Syrian people who are dying and the victims of a brutal conflict that has been thrust on them, in which terrorist groups have destroyed and devastated the entire country. That means that we have shared but differentiated responsibilities within the Security Council. Some countries have been directly involved in this conflict and could do a little more to achieve a political solution. That is why we believe in and support the efforts of the International Syria Support Group, whose two co-Chairs are members of the Security Council.

In addition, we cannot allow the political discussion and division in the Council on this type of vote to distract us from the main goal of the Security Council, which is to defeat terrorism. As a body, our responsibility should be to support a political solution. As stated openly, there are no military solutions. Of course, as human beings we would like to see a radical change in the humanitarian situation for the peoples of Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya, on whom great suffering has been inflicted as a result of the war. That can be achieved only through political agreement, the cessation of hostilities and an agreement to be reached by all parties involved to ensure that Syrians decide their own future without interference and interventionism.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of the United States of America has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): As the origin of the Syrian crisis has been raised by others who just took the floor, in March 2011 protests against Bashar Al-Assad began in Syria. He responded with brutal violence, which dramatically escalated the situation, and then relied upon others to support him. The United Nations responded with numerous resolutions and communiqués, which all start with a ceasefire, and that is what we tried to do today. Any allegations to the contrary about the United States on this matter are absurd.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of Ukraine has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): For the first time in the Security Council, I was very glad to hear the Russian Federation make a comparison between Syria and Ukraine because that is the issue that we have tried to raise here in the Council since we joined. The methods used by the Russian Federation and its proxies in Donbas are exactly the same as those being used in Syria. First they intervene and then play the role of mediator.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The sponsors of terrorism are the ones daydreaming about Syria's downfall, just as they dreamed of burying Iraq, Libya and Yemen. However, I am sure that when they fall asleep they will have nightmares about and be haunted by Syrian, Libyan, Yemeni and Palestinian curses.

From the very first days of the terrorist war imposed on my country, Syria, the United States, France and Britain, which have been calling for action, became worthy of the title of the three musketeers who defend terrorism. If only they modelled themselves after Don Quixote, whom you mentioned, Mr. President, as he was a noble person fighting for human justice. Those three States, in addition to other States outside the Council — such as Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia — call for convening formal and informal meetings and informal-informal consultations, in various formats, and submit one draft resolution after another, in such a way that has pushed the United Nations to abandon its most important purposes and principles in the maintenance of international peace and security.

Through the erroneous practices of some, the Organization has now become a platform and a tool to defend, protect and promote terrorism in Syria and undermine international consensus on combating it. If that continues to be the case, we would not be surprised if the Governments of those States were to nominate terrorists — such as the Briton Jihadi John, the French Abu Murrah, the American Abu Huraira, the Turkish Abu Mekdad, the Saudi Abdullah Al-Muhaysini or the Canadian Abu Abdul Rahman, in addition to Abu Jaafar from Aleppo, who was just mentioned by the representative of the United States — for a Nobel Peace Prize. Or indeed, if the United Kingdom and French Governments were to name a couple of streets in Paris and London after Abu Mohammad Al-Julani, leader of Jabhat Al-Nusra, or Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, leader of Da'esh, in eternal commemoration of their contribution to humanitarian action in Aleppo, the promotion of democracy and the protection of civilians.

We would call on the three musketeers today and ask them where they have been. Why were they silent? Why this shameful posture vis-à-vis the bombing of the Russian field hospital today, with the killing of two Russian doctors and the wounding of staff and patients alike by the self-styled moderate terrorists who are being defended by those States in act, deed and word inside and outside of the Security Council? That field hospital was set up to treat innocent civilians liberated by the Syrian army and its allies from the terrorists of Jabhat Al-Nusra, who had used them as human shields. It is a well-established fact that terrorists entered Aleppo in the summer of 2012, as two United Nations officials, Mr. De Mistura and before him Mr. Stephen O'Brien, finally recognized in their latest briefing (see S/PV.7822) to the Security Council.

The liberation of some 100,000 civilians in Aleppo, from the area members refer to as eastern Aleppo, including tens of thousands of children, was never a part of the plans of the three musketeers' Governments and their proxies. Otherwise, those Governments would have welcomed the achievements of the Syrian army and its allies, who are combating terrorism in Syria on behalf of the entire membership of the international community — now that the threat of terrorism is present in every corner of the world because of the reckless policies and the cheap political blackmail of those Governments.

I will not recount the suffering of our people in Aleppo under the practices of terrorist groups — nor, indeed, the horrific stories being told by those freed from the crime and barbarity of those groups. But I would confirm that the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, supported by its allies, will not give in to the attempts of those three States and their proxies to exploit the Security Council to support terrorists in Syria. We will not let our people in Aleppo down. We will not hesitate in our constitutional and legal duty to expel terrorists from Aleppo and from all Syrian territory. We will not hesitate to save Syrians from the scourge and practices of those groups, in conformity with the principles of international law and in implementation of Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism — just like any State Member of this international Organization that cherishes its sovereignty.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and its allies have abided by all previous periods of calm because we value the lives of Syrian civilians. However, those periods were simply used as an opportunity for terrorist groups, supported and directed by their handlers — some States members of the Security Council and some not — to regroup their forces and reconstitute their terrorist fighters and to obtain more weapons and military, human and logistical supplies in order to carry out their crimes against the Syrian people. In that context, the question being asked by the Syrian people and the free international public opinion is this: Has the Security Council ever adopted a draft resolution to impose a truce on terrorists merely to allow them to take a breath and rearm?

In the face of such cheap political blackmail by the three musketeers, the Syrian Government, supported by its allies, will continue to spare no effort — as it has done since the very first days of the war against terrorism — in upholding international humanitarian law, protecting civilians and fulfilling its duty to assist all Syrians in need, including by recently putting in place safe passage for civilians in Aleppo to facilitate their exit. Armed persons were also given the opportunity to lay down their weapons in order to restore peace and stability to the city. In return, international humanitarian organizations and their officials — including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs — who have cried tears before the Security Council, have to date done nothing to help the people liberated by the Syrian Army from terrorism in Aleppo.

It is now the duty of Member States of this international Organization not to fall victim to the attempts of some States members of the Security Council and outside to force through draft resolutions that only strengthen terrorism and promote it in Syria. No Member State is safe from terrorism. For those who hold high the interests of the Syrian people, either to alleviate their suffering or to reach a Syrian-led political solution, I emphasise that they must knock at the door of the Syrian Government. The address is known to all.

In conclusion, a permanent Member State of the Council, whose Foreign Secretary justifies the killing by the Saudi air force of thousands of civilians in Yemen, destroying that country, surely is in no position to make false accusations against others. Today the Foreign Minister of the United Kingdom said that Saudi Arabia had crossed no red lines in Yemen and that the United Kingdom would continue to provide weapons and advice to Saudi Arabia in its war against Yemen. That was the statement, word for word, from the United Kingdom Foreign Minister, in exact contradiction to what the world is witnessing: the bombing of hospitals, the killing of civilians and the destruction of infrastructure in Yemen.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.78.

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7826th meeting

Monday, 5 December 2016, 4.05 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. González de Linares Palou	(Spain)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gimolieca
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	France	Mrs. Gueguen Mohsen
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Taula
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Coleman
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermudez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-41356 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 4.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Maman Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic; and Mr. Taye-Brook Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

Mr. Sidikou is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Kinshasa.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

After consultations among Council members, I have been authorized to make the following statement on their behalf:

"Following the visit of the Security Council to the Democratic Republic of Congo from 11 to 13 November, the President of the Security Council made the following statement on behalf of the Council regarding the situation in the country:

"The Security Council is monitoring very closely the recent political development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and remains concerned about the risk for destabilization of the country and the region as a whole in the absence of a swift and consensual resolution to the current political crisis, as illustrated by the violence of 19 and 20 September 2016.

"The Security Council thanks the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and all its interlocutors for the fruitful discussions that have taken place during this visit.

"The Security Council acknowledges the political agreement reached on 18 October 2016 and takes note of the appointment of the new Prime Minister. The Security Council is encouraged by the unanimous commitment of Congolese actors to prevent destabilization and to continue inclusive discussions in order to reach a broad consensus towards free, fair, credible, inclusive, transparent, peaceful and timely presidential and legislative elections leading to a peaceful transfer of power in accordance with the Congolese Constitution for the stability, development and consolidation of constitutional democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

"The Security Council further calls on political groups that did not sign the political agreement to remain engaged in dialogue. The Security Council welcomes commitments to respect and preserve the Constitution in letter and spirit and looks forward to the implementation of further confidence-building measures to ease tensions and build consensus.

"The Security Council welcomes the ongoing mediation efforts led by the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo (CENCO) and calls on all political actors to continue working in good faith and in a spirit of compromise towards a swift political solution, before 19 December 2016, that paves the way for peaceful, credible, inclusive and timely elections as soon as possible in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Security Council further encourages the region to pursue its efforts in support of the mediation.

"The Security Council urges the Government, as well as all relevant parties to ensure an environment conducive to free, fair, credible, inclusive, transparent and elections, as recalled in resolution 2277 (2016), which includes a free and constructive political debate, freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of assembly, equitable access to media, including State media, safety and the freedom of movement for all candidates, as well as for election observers and witnesses, journalists, human rights defenders and actors from civil society, including women.

"The Security Council calls on the authorities to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially the right of peaceful assembly, and to exercise maximum restraint in their response to

protests, and also calls upon the opposition forces, for their part, to show responsibility by ensuring the peaceful character of their demonstrations.

"The Security Council reiterates its call upon all political parties, their supporters and other political actors to exercise maximum restraint in their actions and statements, to refrain from violence, violent speeches or other provocations and to address their differences peacefully. The Security Council also calls on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to hold accountable those responsible for the killings on 19 and 20 September and for all human rights violations and abuses. The Security Council takes note of the recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo of the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

"The Security Council stresses the importance for the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its national partners to take all necessary steps to accelerate the preparations for the elections without further delays, including by expediting the update of the voter registry.

"The Security Council is also deeply concerned by the humanitarian situation, which continues to severely affect the civilian population in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the persistence of violence in that area, in particular in North Kivu Province where nearly 840,000 people were internally displaced as of 30 September 2016 and more than 700 civilians have been killed since October 2014. The Security Council urges authorities to hold accountable those deemed responsible for the acts of violence.

"The Security Council calls on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to take further action, in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, as applicable, and with the support of MONUSCO in accordance with its mandate, to end the threat posed by the Allied Democratic Forces, the Forces Democratiques de Libération du Rwanda and all other armed groups operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Security Council encourages further cooperation between the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo and MONUSCO in tackling this violence and continue their efforts to neutralize armed groups operating in eastern Congo.

"The Security Council reiterates its full support to MONUSCO and its appreciation for the Special Representative's leadership in trying to ease tensions. The Security Council urges MONUSCO to fully implement its protection of civilians mandate, including to respond to current and ongoing security threats and reminds troop- and police-contributing countries of the need for a comprehensive approach and to take all necessary measures to carry out MONUSCO's mandate as set forth in resolution 2277 (2016).

"The Security Council welcomes the regional initiatives and efforts by regional States to promote peace, stability and democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to enhance cooperation towards the neutralization of armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the establishment by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda of a Joint Follow-up Mechanism and encourages further action. The Security Council extends its thanks to Angola, Chair of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region, for the fruitful discussions held in Luanda on 14 November 2016. The Security Council also welcomes in that regard the reform of the governing mechanisms of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, including the decision to hold an annual high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism in a signatory State, with a view to strengthening regional ownership of the Framework.

"The Security Council expresses its determination to continue to closely follow the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular the security conditions on the ground and the efforts to successfully conclude the electoral process."

This statement will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2016/18.

I now give the floor to Mr. Sidikou.

Mr. Sidikou (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the opportunity to speak to you and the Council about the situation in the

Democratic Republic of Congo since your visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in November.

My statement will focus on the political situation, with particular emphasis on the good offices undertaken by the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo (CENCO) and the arrangements made by the Mission with regard to the deadline of 19 December and the security situation in particular in the eastern part of the country.

Two weeks after the constitutional end of President Kabila's second and last term, and more than six weeks after the signing of the comprehensive political agreement of 18 October, on peaceful, credible and transparent elections, the political situation remains uncertain. The good offices led by CENCO since early November, with the endorsement of President Kabila and which had aroused great hope for a peaceful exit from the political impasse, seem or seemed to be fading. In complex situations, appearances can sometimes be misleading.

The positions of the key players, namely, those of the presidential majority and the Rassemblement des forces politiques et sociales acquises au changement — known as the Rassemblement de l'opposition — appear not to have changed. The presidential majority continues to reject a second dialogue and the Rassemblement insists on a truly inclusive dialogue. A few moments ago I learned, through a presidential communiqué, that President Kabila just relaunched the CENCO initiative in person, called on it to pursue its mission and assured it of his full support.

(*spoke in English*)

While we are steadfastly continuing our good offices engagement with the Government, the security services, political parties and civil society, we are now fast approaching the symbolic date of 19 December and the period going into early next year with a sense of apprehension. In that context and drawing lessons from the violent events of 19 and 20 September, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has further updated its contingency plans and is further adjusting its posture and deployment to mitigate politically driven violence and protect civilians, to the extent possible within its available resources and in its areas of deployment.

Specifically, the Mission has reinforced its presence and coordination mechanism in Kinshasa to implement our protection of civilian mandates, within capacity, while the force and police continue to carry out day and night patrols in Kinshasa, as well as in other parts of the country. We have also established in Kinshasa, Goma and Lubumbashi three mobile teams to monitor and report on human rights violations and restrictions of political space. Those teams are designed to deploy into areas that are without a permanent MONUSCO presence but are deemed at high risk of politically driven violence. The Mission is also coordinating its plans with the United Nations country team, in particular with regard to the provision of humanitarian assistance to civilian populations that may be displaced by such violence.

Let me stress here that those efforts may not be fully sufficient to mitigate or respond adequately to any major outbreak of politically related violence. First and foremost, it is the political will of the main political actors that will determine how the existing and real tensions are managed and whether or not they degenerate into violence. Secondly, the force and police capabilities available to the Mission in Kinshasa are stretched thin. Furthermore, as the Mission fine-tunes its plans to ensure the safety and security of its personnel and facilities, we are cognizant of the fact that there may well be requests from the diplomatic community and other actors present in Kinshasa for support, which would further stretch the Mission's limited capacities. My senior colleagues and I will continue to work with the Secretariat to address those challenges, and I am grateful for the support of the Council in those matters.

Going forward, it is my hope that the efforts of CENCO, with the support of countries of the region, in particular the Republic of Angola and the Republic of Congo, will eventually broker a rapprochement between the presidential majority and the Rassemblement de l'opposition. Such a rapprochement would contribute to averting violence on 19 December and in the period immediately following, and in the medium term also contribute to a peaceful transition process required for a credible electoral process. I would therefore like to encourage the members of the Council to reinforce the message that it conveyed to the Congolese political actors during their visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo last month, namely, that they remain primarily responsible and accountable for the peace and stability of their country. I hope that the Council

might also express its appreciation for the efforts of CENCO to facilitate a détente between the Government and the Rassemblement.

It is also important for the Council to urge the Prime Minister-designate, Mr. Samy Badibanga, to finalize his commitments with all stakeholders in order to form an inclusive transitional Government to promote a spirit of reconciliation and lead the country through a peaceful and stable transition period.

I would like to conclude by highlighting the fact that, in this period of political uncertainty, the deteriorating economic situation is also having an adverse impact on the stability of the country. Socioeconomic factors constitute an important potential trigger for violence during this period. I would therefore like to echo the Prime Minister-designate's personal appeal to me, when I met with him on 1 December, and his request for the international community's support as his Government intends to re-engage international financial institutions in that regard.

Finally, we must be cautious that the focus on political events in Kinshasa and our preparations to mitigate election-related violence do not distract us from our operations against armed groups in the eastern part of the country. The situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo remains cause for concern and could well be exacerbated by armed groups and criminal networks capitalizing on the political uncertainty at the national level, thereby compounding the risks faced by the civilian population. The spill-over effect of the ongoing conflict in South Sudan, the growing number of South Sudanese refugees arriving in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the presence of armed actors along the border between South Sudan the Democratic Republic of the Congo are also of increasing concern. We must continue to monitor those developments very closely. MONUSCO will therefore continue in a determined manner in its coordinated operations with the Congolese Armed Forces against armed groups to ensure the protection of civilians in the eastern part of the country and with the Congolese police to strengthen the rule of law.

On regional matters that impact the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I will also continue my close coordination and collaboration with Special Envoy Djinnit in our diplomatic efforts at regional level.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Sidikou for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Zerihoun.

Mr. Zerihoun: I thank you, Sir, and members of the Security Council for this opportunity to brief everyone on electoral developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Special Representative of the Secretary-General Sidikou has just briefed everyone on the political and security developments, as well the measures taken by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to provide support and enhance the protection of civilians. I will therefore limit my remarks to what the United Nations has done to support the electoral process.

In resolution 2277 (2016), the Security Council decided that the priority tasks of the United Nations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo should include the provision of technical assistance and logistical support for the revision of the electoral register. Accordingly, the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs undertook an advisory mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 24 April to 10 May, first, to assess the political environment and preparations for updating the voter register and polls; secondly, to assess the capacity of national institutions, including the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) and that of the United Nations as it relates to the implementation of resolution 2277 (2016); and, thirdly, to consider the implications of the implementation for the United Nations in terms of human and financial resources.

The Mission made the assessment that United Nations and international support would be critical to allow the Independent National Electoral Commission to organize the voter registration exercise within the shortest time frame technically possible and that a political agreement among key stakeholders would be necessary to move elections preparations forward peacefully. In accordance with resolution 2277 (2016) and the findings of the advisory mission, the United Nations has been providing support to African Union (AU) facilitation and national stakeholders, including on technical issues pertaining to the electoral process.

As Council members are aware, the 18 October political agreement reached by the presidential majority and part of the opposition provides for a complete overhaul of the voter register by 31 July 2017 and the holding of presidential and legislative elections

simultaneously. It also provides for the possibility of holding local elections on the same day, financial and technical conditions permitting, or within six months following the general elections. Under the agreement, elections would be announced on 30 October 2017, following which CENI is expected to organize the general elections within 6 months — meaning, by April 2018. The agreement also calls on the Government to provide CENI with the logistical and financial resources necessary for the completion of the electoral process.

The timeline suggested by the agreement presents some advantages, including shorter deadlines than the one initially envisaged by CENI, which cuts down the number of days required to organize the elections. However, it is worth noting that this would be the first time for CENI to embark on such a herculean electoral undertaking with such serious logistics implications. Needless to say, the continued support of the international community, including through financial assistance, will be crucial to ensure the success of the electoral process. Furthermore, broadening the base of the political consensus and the acceptance of the electoral timeline by national stakeholders will be critical, given that the only peaceful way out of the current stalemate will be through a negotiated solution.

On 31 July, the voter registration exercise was launched in Gbadolite, which is in Nord-Ubangui province. The registration process is planned to take place in two phases. The first phase is a pilot project, and the second will be staggered over four operational areas to cover approximately 17,500 registration centres throughout the remaining 25 provinces of the country. The pilot project in Nord-Ubangui was completed on 31 October. As of 1 December, almost 90 per cent of the 850,000 prospective voters had been registered. About 45 per cent of them are women. CENI has started preparations for the second phase and the voter registration will be simultaneously launched in the middle of December, in two operational areas covering 12 provinces. In the meantime, registration agents are being trained and the deployment of registration material is under way.

In accordance with resolution 2277 (2016), the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have been providing logistical and technical expertise to concerned national stakeholders for the registration process. MONUSCO logistics support alone includes the transportation of more than 3,500 tons of registration materials to 16 main hubs and to at least 104 of the 225 antenna sites. CENI is taking care of the remainder of the antenna sites and the registration centres. Since 28 October, MONUSCO has provided four cargo planes and 16 helicopters to CENI, and since then 520 tons of registration materials have been transferred by the Mission from Kinshasa to other provinces. In addition, MONUSCO has provided support for the deployment of 50 voter registration agents.

Council members will recall that in 2015, UNDP established an electoral project further to the recommendations of the 2013 electoral needs assessment mission. However, the capacities of the project to provide assistance are stretched to the breaking point. Out of a project budget of $123 million, only about $10 million have been mobilized. Financial constraints continue to prevent UNDP from properly staffing the project and implementing planned activities.

MONUSCO and the Secretariat are also taking administrative steps aimed at providing the United Nations with the material and human resources necessary to undertake the technical and logistical support to CENI. As recommended by the advisory mission, the MONUSCO electoral division is being established with a view to putting in place an integrated electoral assistance team that brings together UNDP and the MONUSCO electoral division. The Department of Political Affairs is providing support to the process through the electoral roster. In addition to the electoral expert deployed to support AU facilitation, the Department of Political Affairs has deployed its principal electoral officer, based at the United Nations Office to the African Union in Addis Ababa, to spearhead the Mission's electoral support efforts, pending the recruitment of a director for the electoral division of MONUSCO.

On 31 October, a joint centre comprising experts from CENI and the United Nations was established to better coordinate voter registration operations. United Nations support to the voter registration process is being provided amid a very challenging political, financial and security environment. Moreover, the electoral calendar and the funding of the process by the Government are still not fully clear. Out of an electoral budget of over $1 billion, the Government is committed to disbursing $300 million in 2016. However, while the Government paid $20 million monthly from January to June and similar monthly allotments in Congolese

francs from July to September, it reportedly has not disbursed any funds since October.

Despite the challenges faced by the political process, the international community will need to exert additional effort to help improve the political environment surrounding preparations for the elections, most notably with a view to securing a level playing field, as well as to providing necessary technical and financial assistance. It is essential that MONUSCO and UNDP be provided the means to deliver on their commitments and mandates.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Zerihoun for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. To that end, the presidency will use the flashing lights on the collars of the microphones to prompt speakers to bring their remarks to a close.

Mr. Iliichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We note the effective efforts of Special Envoy of African Union, Mr. Edem Kodjo, in assisting the successful conclusion of the intra-Congolese political dialogue and the signing of the political agreement of 18 October. We are corvinced that that agreement will play a role in ensuring political stability in the very difficult time leading up to the election. We commend the 17 November appointment of Mr. Samy Badibanga to the post of Prime Minister as the first step in implementing the agreement. We call on the political forces in the country that have not signed the agreement to continue to participate in the political process.

We are convinced that the interpretation of the agreement with respect to defining the update of the voter register and the concrete time frame for holding the presidential election should be determined by the Congolese people themselves. The intervention of external players on the pretext of imposing their psuedo-recommendations for organizing the electoral process and broadening the political space is unacceptable. Such actions are liable to violate the equilibrium that has been achieved with such difficulty. We should refrain from interpreting Congolese fundamental law, because the country has its own Constitutional Court, which on 11 May ruled concerning the procedure for the termination of the powers of the President and parliamentarians.

We regret the victims of 20 and 21 September demonstrations. However, we suggest that it would be logical to talk about human rights violations only after the investigations have been completed and the role played by opposition leaders in provoking the unrest and violence against Government representatives has been assessed.

The main reason for the Democratic Republic of the Congo's place on the Security Council's agenda is the fact that the conflict has not been resolved and illegal armed groups remain active in the eastern regions of the country. We are pleased to note the full cooperation that has been established between the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Government of the country, and we pay tribute to the personal efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Maman Sidikou.

We hope that the re-establishment of full-scale joint operations of the MONUSCO Force Intervention Brigade and the Congolese army to neutralize illegal armed groups, will ultimately help to eliminate the security vacuum in the eastern part of the country. We also commend Kinshasa's efforts to improve its cooperation on security issues with the Governments of neighbouring Uganda and Rwanda. We believe it important for States members of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) to step up their efforts to ensure the implementation by all signature countries of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. In that regard, we note the efforts being made by ICGLR under the presidency of Angola. We call for the provisions of the Framework to be invoked in addressing the problem concerning the arrival of supporters of the former First Vice-President of South Sudan, Mr. Machar, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in August.

The problems of the region cannot be resolved through force. We need to implement plans for the disarmament, demobilization and repatriation of former fighters of the Mouvement du 23 mars. So far steps have been made in that area only by the Democratic Republic of the Congo itself. It is important that MONUSCO remain impartial and limit itself strictly to its Security Council mandate on the eve of the elections. We are

convinced that a close partnership with Kinshasa will allow the Mission to fulfil its role of stabilization.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Our meeting today is taking place shortly after the very important meeting that the Security Council organized in mid-November (see S/PV.7819). Today's meeting clearly highlights the importance that the Security Council attaches to the latest developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We acknowledge the impact of the events in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the stability of the Great Lakes region and the region as a whole. I would like to make a few comments in that regard.

It goes without saying that the upcoming elections, as outlined in the Constitution, are of special and indeed historical importance for the fate of the country. They will enhance stability, the constitutional order and the country's institutions. In that light, Egypt insists on the importance of the political agreement that was reached thanks to the mediation of Mr. Kodjo, paving the way for free and peaceful elections. We welcome the measures that have been taken to implement the agreement, particularly the nomination of a new Prime Minister. The credibility of the agreement naturally depends on its appropriate implementation without further delay, including preparations for the elections, ensuring their transparency, adopting confidence-building measures, protecting the fundamental freedoms of citizens, and ensuring the freedom of the press, within the framework of the law.

In addition to the implementation of the agreement, all political actors must work to build a broad consensus in order to ensure the stability necessary for the organization of the elections in accordance with the Constitution. We welcome the efforts being undertaken to that end, in particular those of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo. We call on all political actors to contribute to those efforts and to demonstrate flexibility. We urge them to seek ways to overcome their differences and conflicts in order to preserve and guarantee the stability and security of the country. In that context, Egypt strongly welcomes presidential statement S/PRST/2016/18, adopted by the Council today, which refers to our ongoing support for those efforts.

I would like to say a word on the very important role played by the African Union and other regional organizations, in particular the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region under the leadership of Angola, which has played a very important role in what has been achieved so far. We need to step up our efforts to overcome the remaining difficulties.

I further note that the future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must be decided solely by its own people and institutions country. Respect for the Constitution is incumbent on all national actors, while the international community must also respect the sovereignty, independence and Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That is indeed an essential factor for preserving peace and security there.

I would like to very briefly focus on the situation in the east of the country. I have made two visits to the country over the past few months, first with the Council and also within the framework of the Committee pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004), which Egypt has the honour of chairing. On both occasions I was able to see first-hand the suffering of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the horrible living conditions they endure in that part of the country.

In the context of the cooperation between the Congolese army and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, military operations have been bolstered, which has enabled significant progress against armed groups. Unfortunately, those efforts have not prevented those groups from committing crimes and violence against the civilian population, not to mention an increase in ethnic tensions, such as the attack on a camp in North Kivu. That, of course, has contributed to a deteriorating situation in the east of the country.

Furthermore, in order to find a lasting solution it is important to make progress on the issue of reconciliation. Tensions need to be eased and the grievances of the local population heeded, including those of refugees and displaced people. It is also important to combat impunity, ensure the rule of law and expand the authority of the Government. We also need to improve the living conditions of the citizens. Lastly, we need to find a solution to the crisis characterized by the illegal export of natural resources, because it threatens the economic development of the country.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Sidikou and Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun for their briefings.

The political process in the Democratic Republic of Congo is at a critical junction. President Kabila and the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo are committed to advancing national dialogue, safeguarding State stability and promoting economic and social development, which China welcomes.

In the meantime, the security situation in the country remains quite fragile. The achievement of lasting peace, prosperity and development is an arduous task and has a long way to go. It therefore needs continued support from the international community. The Council visited the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola in early November, which reflects the importance that the Security Council attaches to the issue of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. China would like to make the following observations on this issue.

First, we resolutely promote the political process in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the relevant opposition parties have signed a political agreement tht covers the election schedule, the establishment of a political transition and the appointment of a new Prime Minister. China welcomes those developments. We call on the opposition parties that are not yet part of the national dialogue to sign onto the the political agreement as soon as possible, resolve their differences through dialogue and dedicate themselves to the peace, stability and development of the country. The international community should respect the development path independently chosen by the Democratic Republic of Congo and, on the basis of respecting the sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of Congo, provide constructive assistance to the political process.

Secondly, we vigorously promote security and stability in the country. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Democratic Republic of Congo governing forces have made positive headway in their fight against armed groups. Countries in the Great Lakes region are interdependent; their security is closely connected. China encourages countries in the region to continue with the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Region. Furthermore, it calls on them to make more progress in the implementation of the Nairobi Declaration and in their response to the threat posed by armed groups.

Thirdly, the roles of regional and subregional organizations should have full play. The African Union (AU) has played an important role in facilitating national dialogue in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) held a high-level meeting on the topic and issued a communiqué, which demonstrates the support of countries in the region for a political settlement of the problem. The United Nations should give full play to the comparative advantages of regional and subregional organizations, such as the AU and ICGLR, thereby strengthening coordination and cooperation with each other with a view to creating synergy. China appreciates and supports the positive role of MONUSCO in promoting peace aad stability in the Democratic Republic of Congo and advancing the political process, including disarmament and demobilization.

The Chinese Government has always supported the peace process of the Democratic Republic of Congo and, over the years, has provided assistance to its nation-building efforts within its capacity. We have also sent peacekeepers to MONUSCO. Along with the broader international community, China stands ready to continue our constructive role in the realization of peace, stability and development in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Mr. Taula (New Zealand): There has been no shortage of warnings to the Security Council regarding the risk of conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The failure to undertake timely preparations for the electoral list were apparent a year ago. And in July, the Deputy Secretary-General warned the Security Council (see S/PV.7732) that violence and instability associated with a political crisis could still preventable if an inclusive political agreement could be reached. We saw early signs of that instability and violence manifest itself, with dozens killed on 19 and 20 September. But a slow, burning situation can be among the most challenging for the Security Council to address when we are confronted with so many emergencies at the same time. And influencing the parties in a situation that has been on the Security Council's agenda for so long is not easy. Visiting missions, like the one we undertook last month, is important in order to engage directly with the Governments and other stakeholders, listen to them and deliver messages from Council members directly to the parties.

We are pleased that we have now agreed on a common set of messages in today's presidential

statement S/PRST/2016/18. That is an important outcome, although ideally it would have been preferable to issue the statement closer to the time of the visit. There are a few points that deserve particular emphasis.

First, the Congolese political leadership — both in Government and opposition — must heed the calls from the Council to act with a spirit of compromise to achieve a consensus political agreement on the path ahead, building on the 18 October agreement and before the scheduled end of the President's current term at the end of December.

Secondly, political leaders on all sides need to encourage a political environment in which the Congolese can freely engage, with freedom of assembly and the media, while avoiding incitement of violence.

Thirdly, as was underscored by our visit and meetings in Luanda, the region is among those first to face the implications of conflict, and it has a key role to play in building support for an inclusive political agreement.

The Congolese continue to suffer from insecurity in the eastern parts of the country. When we were in Beni last month, we saw the fear and anger felt by Congolese who are suffering from appalling human rights abuses. While addressing the immediate political crisis in Kinshasa, we must also remain engaged on the imperative of stabilizing the security situation in the east, protecting civilians, neutralizing armed groups, such as Allied Democratic Force and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, and establishing accountability for the human rights abuses that have taken place. The Congolese authorities have the lead role to play in achieving that, supported by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). At the same time, MONUSCO must devote resources and be well prepared for conflict risks associated with the political crisis. The missions ongoing contingency-planning efforts are particularly important in that regard, as outlined by Mr. Sidikou.

Finally, we would have seen real value in Assistant Secretary-General Andrew Gilmour participating in this briefing to share his observations on his recent visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo and the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights inside the country. Indeed, the linkage between human rights abuses as a potential driver of conflict could not be clearer than the present circumstances.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Maman Sambo Sidikou, and the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, for their comprehensive briefings.

I would like to once more reiterate Uruguay's commitment to stability and peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo, not just as an elected member of the Security Council but also as a country that has contributed troops to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in an uninterrupted fashion over the past 16 years.

As referred to in presidential statement S/PRST/2016/18, the Security Council undertook a field visit a little less than a month ago and the messages that were conveyed focused on the political and security situation in the country. The Democratic Republic of Congo finds itself at a decisive moment in its history in political terms. Furthermore, both the Congolese population and the international community have great expectations vested in the holding of free, transparent, inclusive and credible elections.

Political stakeholders, who should act in the interests of the nation and its inhabitants, have the enormous responsibility of achieving the necessary consensus to hold credible elections without unjustified delays, so as to avoid any escalation of tension or violence. Uruguay wishes to reiterate its call to political groups that have yet to join the dialogue process to do so and play a constructive role that can contribute to the proper holding of elections.

Of concern are the complaints of violations of civil and political rights, including violations of the freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, that have been committed, inter alia, by forces or personnel linked to the Government. It would be better for the persons responsible for such violations be brought to justice to account for their acts sooner rather than later. Uruguay wishes to emphasize that it will be of great importance during the preparation, development and implementation of the election process that all necessary guarantees be provided for the monitoring, protection and promotion of human rights.

Unfortunately, many rulers in Africa and still more in other parts of the world are calling for constitutional reforms when they wish to extend their terms in office. Every constitution involves laborious negotiations in which almost all political actors and parties and civil society organizations of a country participate. A constitution also implies a delicate and balanced social, political and legal pact in which all the citizens of a country subscribe to or have what is referred to in English as "ownership" of the country's *magna carta*.

Reforming constitutions with the sole objective of extending elected terms of office or of allowing for persons in power to be re-elected has proved to be a misguided and damaging practice for the political and democratic evolution of States over the past 40 years. One day, all Governmental leaders without exception will understand that the essence of democracy is the regular holding of general elections in accordance with constitutional guarantees and that what is important about that is seeing political alternation among different political parties as natural and healthy for society as a whole. We hope that the unanimous political messages delivered by the members of the Council during their recent visit to the country are echoed throughout the political class and the population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Finally, Uruguay wishes to pay tribute to each and every one of the officials deployed in MONUSCO who have been making an enormous sacrifice on a daily basis to contribute to the peace and stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They are, without a doubt, the true guarantee that this entire process comes to fruition.

Mrs. Adnin (Malaysia): I wish to the thank the briefers, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Sidikou and Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun, for their update on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Continued monitoring and reporting by the United Nations on developments on the ground are crucial at this critical juncture.

Over the past decade, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has made great strides in overcoming its conflict-ridden past and shown immense determination in addressing remaining challenges to peace and security. Consolidating democratic gains and setting the stage for a peaceful transition of power in accordance with the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we believe, is a key step to securing the lasting peace and stability desired.

The current long-simmering political impasse over electoral processes is therefore deeply worrying and poses an immediate challenge that risks undoing the positive gains we have recently seen in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Security Council travelled to the Democratic Republic of the Congo last month to show solidarity with the Congolese people, with a view to improving the political and security situation, including through supporting efforts for credible, transparent and inclusive elections. In this regard, we welcome the presidential statement adopted today (S/PRST/2016/18), and, in our national capacity, we wish to reiterate some of the key messages contained therein.

First, all parties agree that sincere and inclusive dialogue is the only path to peacefully resolving the political impasse. The agreement reached on 18 October in the context of the national dialogue was an important first step towards resolution. However, it is clear that more inclusive engagement is needed to achieve an outcome that all Congolese stakeholders can rally behind.

Secondly, we urge all political stakeholders to return to the negotiating table in good faith and engage in dialogue towards a swift and consensual way forward. In this regard, we emphasize our support for the mediation efforts of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo.

Thirdly, it is imperative that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and all political leaders issue strong messages to their supporters that violence is unacceptable. This warning must be backed by quick and impartial measures to investigate all cases of violence and hold perpetrators or instigators to account.

Fourthly, we call for the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and all political stakeholders to continue taking confidence-building measures to mitigate tensions and create an environment conducive to dialogue. We appeal to all stakeholders to act responsibly and refrain from rhetoric and actions that could exacerbate the situation.

While the fate and future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo rests in Congolese hands alone, we call on the regional and international communities to lend their full and proactive support to mitigating

tensions, averting the risk of violence and ensuring that the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains on the path of peace and security.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I thank you, Mr. President, for this urgent meeting. I am very grateful for the sobering analysis just shared by our briefers.

As we have heard so clearly, the clock is ticking for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the world is watching. Just two weeks remain until President Kabila's second term comes to an end — two weeks to prevent even more violence, even more deaths and even more conflict in a country that has already suffered too much. So here in this open meeting we have an opportunity to send an unequivocal message to President Kabila that he must make the right choice, respect the Constitution, respect the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, respect his two-term limit, commit not to stand, and hold elections as soon as possible. In truth, there is no other option. We all know what comes next if he makes the wrong decision. We saw it in the bloodied streets of Kinshasa in September. We cannot allow such barbarity to be repeated in a fortnight's time.

We know what needs to happen. The Constitution is clear. President Kabila's term ends on 19 December. The two-term limit cannot be changed, and certainly not just to suit one man's political agenda. The Government must reach a consensual political agreement that is in line with the Constitution before that date. President Kabila heard this message loudly and clearly when the Security Council visited last month. It is a message that the United Kingdom's Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development, James Wharton, repeated only two weeks ago.

It is now time for Kabila and his Government to undertake confidence-building measures so that can mediation efforts have a chance of success. This means dropping the spurious charges against opposition members, releasing political prisoners and lifting the media ban. It also means that all sides must reject violence and commit to peaceful dialogue. In these efforts, we fully support the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo and the mediated discussions between the Government and opposition groups. We urge all parties to continue to engage in dialogue to reach a peaceful compromise before 19 December.

But that is only half of the message that we need to send today. If President Kabila ignores the Council, we must be clear that there will be consequences. It cannot be business as usual if nothing has changed in two weeks' time. The Government must respect human rights and fundamental freedoms essential to political debate and credible elections, freedom of speech and assembly, access to the media and accountability for human rights abuses. Not respecting these fundamental norms increases tensions and heightens the risk of violence.

In October, the European Union threatened to impose sanctions on members of the Democratic Republic of the Congo security forces responsible for the suppression of these fundamental freedoms and the abuse of human rights. The Council needs to be prepared to respond in a similar fashion if the situation deteriorates. In parallel, we also need to be preparing to help, should the worst occur. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo needs to have contingency planning in place to respond effectively if needed. The biggest peacekeeping mission in the world, with a clear mandate to protect civilians robustly, cannot stand by if civilians are threatened.

As I said at the start, the world is watching. But it is watching us in the Council just as much as it is watching President Kabila. We have seen countless times how difficult it is to bring peace and stability to a country or region after conflict has begun. We are discussing here a situation where the violence has not yet erupted. We have an opportunity to stop a conflict before it begins, so we owe it to the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to the credibility of the Security Council on conflict prevention to make sure that President Kabila listens.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): We are grateful to you, Mr. President, and to the briefers.

Just recently, the Council had an important occasion and a prime opportunity to deliver our concerns directly to the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Joseph Kabila. The political agreement of 18 October 2016 can be seen as an indication of political will among a large part of the national stakeholders to prevent the destabilization of the country.

At the same time, it is, in our opinion, only a starting point in the long process of resolving accumulated disagreements and problems among all political actors. Therefore, the continuation of an inclusive dialogue among all national stakeholders in order to hold free, fair and credible, inclusive and transparent elections in

the Democratic Republic of the Congo should be the next, obvious step. There is no other way to address this already complicated situation.

If the situation descends into violence, there will be no winners, only losers. Ukraine calls on all national stakeholders to continue the dialogue and find common ground for a nationwide compromise as soon as possible.

The deaths of protesters during the 19 and 20 September clashes this year are still fresh in our memory. Thus, considering the information that is incoming about preparations for public protests after 19 December, as was announced by some opposition parties, we call for maximum restraint and urge the Government to refrain from responding to provocative acts with force, which would only aggravate the fragile situation. Respect for human rights, particularly the freedom of assembly, freedom of opinion and expression, and equitable access to the media are of paramount importance for creating an environment conducive to the holding of future elections.

We call on all political actors to continue working in a spirit of compromise to reach a swift and consensual resolution of the current political crisis and prevent further destabilization of the country after 19 December.

We expect that this message, as well as today's statement by the President of the Security Council (S/PRST/2016/18), will be heard by all parties concerned. The perpetual cycle of violence has to be broken; otherwise, our efforts will suffer the fate of the infamous rock of Sisyphus.

In conclusion, I want to recall a recent example that struck me deeply. In November, the United Nations peacekeeping Facebook page posted information about the excavation of an armoured fighting vehicle operated by Malaysian peacekeepers stationed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the early 1960s. The vehicle, inaugurated as a memorial to the first peacekeeping operation, was termed "a tangible symbol of the history of peacekeepers in the Congo". Below that post, someone wrote,

> "We do not need memorial pictures for a truck or tank. We need food, water, new shelter or a cruise ship to temporarily house these people in desperate need."

To me, it is a sobering reminder of the fact that in more than six decades, the United Nations presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo still has not fully succeeded in stabilizing that country. We should not let history repeat itself.

Ms. Coleman (United States of America): I wish at the outset to thank our briefers.

As we approach the constitutionally mandated end of President Kabila's term, on December 19, the United States is increasingly concerned about the risk of widespread violence and instability. We thank the African Union for facilitating the national dialogue that led to the October 18 accord, which was a good start but, unfortunately, lacked the buy-in of major opposition parties, lacked adequate guarantees to ensure a transfer of power and included in unnecessary delay in the timeline for presidential elections, a delay until April 2018.

The ongoing mediation efforts by the Congolese National Conference of Bishops (CENCO) are an important step towards improving the agreement and make it more inclusive. CENCO's efforts represent the best hope for reaching a consensus agreement among key stakeholders that ensures timely elections and a peaceful transition of power in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The United States is not alone in its support for CENCO's efforts or in our concern for the increasing risk of instability and violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. During the Security Council's visit to Kinshasa, Council members agreed that the only way ahead was on a clear consensual path that could forestall violence and allow for elections and a transition of power. I would particularly like to thank France and Angola for their leadership during the Security Council trip to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola. The type of direct, united messaging that we heard during that visit was exactly what was needed.

The Security Council knows what is ahead if a consensual way forward is not found. The violence and loss of life that we have repeatedly seen in Kinshasa surrounding previous electoral periods and the deadly events of September 19 and 20 remind us of the need for consensus on holding presidential elections in 2017 and guaranteeing the country's first democratic transition of power. To ensure a smooth, peaceful transition, the

Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must take several steps.

First, the Democratic Republic of the Congo needs to protect political space and respect for human rights, including the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. When the Government cuts off legitimate means of expression, it forces individuals to use more confrontational methods to have their voices heard.

Secondly, it is now time for President Kabila to make a clear, public statement that he will not seek a third term.

Thirdly, the Democratic Republic of Congo also needs increased electoral safeguards to ensure free and fair elections, such as changes in the leadership of the Independent National Electoral Commission, guarantees for a transfer of power and an electoral timeline that holds presidential elections in 2017. On the technical side of the electoral process, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has known since 2011 the timing for elections and the need to revise the voter rolls. We are highly sceptical of the recent conclusion by the Commission that an election cannot be held until December 2018. A range of technical experts have indicated that presidential elections could take place in 2017. The Government's failure to move forward with undertaking and completing this task is not a technical problem. It is a problem of political will. We support CENCO's efforts to revisit the electoral calendar.

The Security Council preaches the mantra of preventive diplomacy, but to put these words into practice, the Council must maintain its pressure on the Democratic Republic of the Congo stakeholders to come to a consensual agreement on the way forward. We must also continue to press for respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and we must continue to press for a clear timeline and a path forward that ensure that elections proceed and that President Kabila steps down.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The Senegalese delegation, like others that spoke before it, would like to thank the briefers, Mr. Sidikou and Mr. Zerihoun, for their very constructive presentations. We also thank France for having taken the initiative to convene this meeting, which is evidence of its tireless commitment to this issue following its co-leadership, with Angola, of the visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Luanda. The presidential statement that we have just adopted (S/PRST/2016/18) is a further demonstration of the leadership of those two countries.

We are pleased to see the Council devote particular attention to the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This is justified given the vital national and regional importance of the country's stability given the country's strategic position in the Great Lakes region, a region that has been beset for years now by complex security and political crises. During our visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we were able to see the complex realities on the ground, which remain characterized by various trends despite the clear progress represented by the political agreement of 18 October emanating from the political dialogue facilitated by the African Union.

In our opitnio, this agreement remains a good basis for our work, but needs to be consolidated by the commitment of the whole of the range of common stakeholders and also international partners support. That is why my delegation urges the Security Council to support the efforts of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo aimed at bringing together the positions of the political actors on the electoral process, the mechanisms for managing the transition and measures for re-establishing trust. And while we welcome Angola's efforts as Chair of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, we also encourage the African Union and the regional mechanisms and frameworks to continue to work for a peaceful political process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo conducive to free, fair, credible, inclusive, transparent and peaceful presidential elections.

That goal is still attainable for the Congolese people, their political actors and the international community. The only issue that matters is enabling the Democratic Republic of the Congo to attain it. In our view, for the Security Council to do that, as it did during our visit there, it must with one voice encourage the country's political actors, civil society and its people as a whole, first, to explore further the inexhaustible possibilities of dialogue with, on the one hand, a formal, unequivocal commitment to peace and respect for human and civil rights and to preserving the people's life and property and ensuring public order and stability; and, on the other hand, to demonstrating a genuine willingness to seek compromise and reinforcing a spirit of mutual trust.

Secondly, the Council should urge the political actors, civil society and people of the Democratic

Republic of the Congo to engage in a peaceful, open and inclusive political process, which is still the only path that can lead to the calm, credible elections that we all desire. Clearly, we have to consider the financial challenge that the political process presents and that is crucial to its predictability. In this atmosphere of uncertainty, we must also act quickly or run the risk of seeing the economic and humanitarian situation deteriorate, exacerbate tensions and undermine the foundations of a peaceful political process. Lastly, the continued worrying situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo should absolutely not become a distraction from the essential task of focusing on the political process.

In this context, the challenge for the United Nations generally, and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in particular, is to maintain its level of engagement in the East regarding the protection of civilians and the fight against the armed groups in support of the Congolese security forces' actions. To that end, we believe it vital that the Mission's forces be reconfigured with the aim of dealing with the potential risk presented by the country's overall political and security situation in a very delicate electoral context. In that regard, and in conclusion, we would like to assure MONUSCO — which we warmly commend for its extraordinary efforts, considering the size and complexity of the problems it is dealing with and which, by the way, we were able to see for ourselves during our visit — that it has the continued support of the Senegalese delegation and of Senegal itself, which, as the Council knows, is a troop contributor to this important Mission.

Mr. Okamura (Japan): I would like to thank Special Representative Sidikou and Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun for their briefings.

Japan welcomes the timely adoption today of presidential statement S/PRST/2016/18, following the Council's visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo last month. With 19 December two weeks away, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is entering a critical phase on the peace and security front. Japan would like to urge the Congolese stakeholders to heed the following three points. First, the Government and the opposition should engage seriously in a direct dialogue. During the Council's visit to Kinshasa, I advocated strongly for ensuring that President Kabila and Mr. Tshisekedi have direct talks aimed at finding a way forward. Both parties should show leadership in that regard.

Secondly, preventing and avoiding mass violence is a responsibility shared by all Congolese parties, in the opposition as well as the Government. Violence in the streets must never become the last resort for achieving any political objectives. We very much hope that the opposition leaders will show how determined they are to prevent demonstrations from being spoiled by violence. I am very much in agreement with Mr. Sidikou when he rightly said that a display of political will on both sides is urgently needed.

Lastly, during our meeting in Kinshasa some members of the ruling party told us that logistical and financial difficulties were preventing them from organizing the elections on time. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is proud of its national institutions. Many African countries, including nations that are poorer than the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have succeeded in organizing elections. If the Democratic Republic of the Congo is united and determined to conduct this democratic exercise, I am confident that it will overcome its difficulties and hold successful elections. I hope that the strong message to that effect from the Security Council and the international community reaches the political leaders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Japan also reaffirms its full support for Special Representative Sidikou and for the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Gimolieca (Angola): I would like to thank Mr. Zerihoun and Mr. Sidikou for their briefings on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Angola welcomed the signing on 18 October of a comprehensive political agreement on organizing peaceful, credible and transparent elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and notes with appreciation the confidence-building measures that the Government has taken so far, encouraging all the Congolese stakeholders to remain committed to peace and the political process. On 12 November, the Government of Angola issued a declaration on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, stating that it would be closely monitoring its neighbour's situation, based on the two countries' relations of friendship and cooperation and their historical and cultural ties, and affirming Angola's respect for the sovereignty of the

Democratic Republic of the Congo and its policy of non-interference in that country's affairs.

Angola believes that peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo must be preserved, since they are crucial to peace and stability in the region, especially in central and southern Africa and the Great Lakes area. We also believe firmly that the country's ongoing political disputes must be resolved through dialogue and without violence or any other illegitimate means. While we affirm our support for a peaceful solution to the disputes between the Government and the opposition, we call on the parties concerned to maintain dialogue and negotiations as a means of finding a way out of their political and pre-electoral impasse and avoiding violent confrontation at all costs.

We also welcome the decision to entrust the post of Prime Minister to someone from the ranks of the opposition, who we encourage to engage in any inclusive dialogue as a key instrument to ending the crisis. Respect for the Constitution and other legal instruments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo by the Government and the opposition are fundamental prerequisites, which presuppose that the President of the Republic can be replaced only through a democratic electoral process.

The appointment of Mr. Samy Badibanga as the new Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to lead the transitional Government is a key development in the complex political situation prevailing in the country and we encourage the Prime Minister to pursue negotiations for a national dialogue with all Congolese political actors and stakeholders. The recent announcement that elections will take place after the completion of voter registration be a positive sign of commitment to organizing elections in due course. It is our firm desire that the Congolese authority and the people be able to put their differences aside and engage in a transparent dialogue in order to establish an inclusive transitional Government and agree on a road map to guide the country to political stability, post-electoral peace and development.

Finally, we reiterate our support for the efforts of the African Union facilitation, led by Mr. Edem Kodjo and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mr. Maman Sidikou, and welcome the regional initiatives, in particular that of the International Conference of the Great Lakes region, aimed at strengthening synergies with the Security Council in line with the common vision expressed during the recent visit to Angola by the Security Council mission.

Mr. Suárez Moreno (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. Sidikou and Mr. Zerihoun for their briefings. We are convinced that the agreement reached in October between the main political and social stakeholders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, within the framework of a national dialogue on organizing democratic, credible and transparent elections, is the foundation for a road map that will lead to the holding of presidential elections. In that regard, the establishment of a Government of national accord and the appointment of a new Prime Minister are positive achievements, in line with the agreement reached by the parties.

We believe that the national dialogue initiative must be ongoing and inclusive because it is perhaps a way to assist in achieving political and institutional stability. We are convinced that it will strengthen the climate of trust needed to achieve consensus among all political stakeholders, including those who are not yet part of the national dialogue. In that regard, the Security Council must continue to support the efforts at dialogue in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and initiatives of the support group for the facilitation of the national dialogue led by the African Union facilitator, the good offices of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Southern African Development Community. All political stakeholders must be encouraged to participate in a constructive dialogue to dispel any institutional uncertainty in the coming days.

With regard to security, we remain concerned about the recurrence of violent incidents perpetrated by insurgent groups, Congolese and foreign alike, in north and south Kivu, which exacerbates a humanitarian situation with grave impact on the civilian population in the eastern part of the province. In addition, we are concerned about the rise in the number of internally displaced persons, clashes among communities and insecurity in the region. We believe that the decision on the steps to be taken now lies in the hands of the Congolese people without the intervention of external actors. The international community must assist the Congolese, in strict compliance with the principles of independent sovereignty, in the goal of preventing violence as a way to resolve political differences, which are a threat to the stability of the country and the region as a whole.

Ms. Gueguen Mohsen (France) (*spoke in French*): I will be brief. The Council has been clear and unanimous in presidential statement S/PRST/2016/18, which was read at the start of today's meeting. I will make three points.

First, the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains of concern. The country is at a critical juncture in terms of its political and security environment, and a fully inclusive political agreement has not yet been reached in spite of the messages conveyed during the visit of the Security Council and the mediation efforts of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, which we support and believe must continue. The temptation to be swept into a power struggle is present on all sides, but that game is a dangerous one. If the downward spiral of violence begins, no one will be able to predict how it might be stopped. It must be prevented at all costs.

Secondly, the Council must steadfastly pursue the preventive diplomacy efforts that it has undertaken since its visit to the country. We have been unanimous in reiterating the expectations of the Council with regard to Congolese political leaders by encouraging a full-fledged, consensus-based dialogue to peaceably settle ongoing disputes and by urging the Government to implement the confidence-building measures necessary to bring about a swift conclusion to the dialogue, such as the release of political prisoners, the end to judicial proceedings and the removal of obstacles to freedom of the press. The onus is on Congolese political stakeholders to take the steps necessary to maintain stability and hold elections as quickly as possible, in line with the provisions of the Constitution. To date, that has not occurred. We must therefore steer them in that direction.

Thirdly, that is indeed the goal of the presidential statement that we just adopted. France thanks all members of the Council for the constructive work that has allowed the text to be adopted by consensus. The presidential statement is a clear expression of the Council's expectations on confidence-building measures and the need for flexibility in a spirit of compromise. A political agreement that is more in-depth and inclusive must be swiftly reached. It is key to preventing a major political crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that could destabilize the entire region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Spain.

My statement will be brief because almost all has been said. I would like to convey three messages.

First, I thank Mr. Sidikou and Mr. Zerihoun. We fully support their efforts and work. We know that this is a very difficult time for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and for the entire Great Lakes region and that is why their briefings and recommendations are especially valuable to us.

My second message is an urgent one — there is no time to waste. The Security Council has been committed for decades to the situation and to restoring peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the most recent proof of that fact was our visit to the country. We are all very aware of the threat of political instability looming over the country. That is why we must redouble our preventive diplomacy efforts. Each passing day counts. We must continue working until an inclusive and comprehensive agreement is reached among all of the country's political leaders. The date of 19 December should not be a fatalistic one. If we all work together, it should be a date on which we all celebrate a peaceful political transition agreement.

My third message is one of support. In the Council, we have supported each and every initiative to ensure a peaceful transition of power in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We support the appointment of new Prime Minister Badibanga. We believe him to be open, flexible, non-authoritarian and a man of good will. He is a true bridge to dialogue with the opposition, rather than an instrument of the Government or a traitor to the post, as the most radical have set him out to be. He is someone we must support if we wish to find a good faith solution.

We must also support the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, which has done a remarkable job and has recently overcome the significant obstacle of having been rejected and accused as been exceedingly unfavourable towards the opposition. We must continue to support it because we believe it to be a key instrument for inclusive dialogue and for reaching an agreement. We also obviously support the unity of the Security Council, as demonstrated once again in the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2016/18 earlier this evening. The statement sends an appropriate message and strikes a balanced tone. We also wish to join France

in thanking all delegations for their efforts towards and commitment to achieving our success. The presidential statement is not an end in and of itself, but rather one more milestone in a sustained effort that the Council must make in order for the Democratic Republic of the Congo to return to political normalcy.

I now resume my function as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Gata Mavita wa Lufuta (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, and express how honoured we are to have you preside over the deliberations of the Security Council for the month of December. I extend a warm welcome to the friendly country of Spain, with which the Democratic Republic of the Congo enjoys an excellent relationship based on mutual respect.

I would also like to pay tribute to the President of last month's deliberations, the representative of Senegal, and thank him for the way he steered the deliberations of the Council in November.

Finally, Mr. President, I thank you for having taken the initiative of convening this meeting, thereby enabling the Council to once again sit and consider the situation in my country.

After the briefings of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, allow me to speak briefly about the security situation that the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) are pursuing in the east of our country — the fight against armed groups, particularly the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). While the attacks of the FDLR are sporadic, the clashes with the ADF — as the army has consistently pointed out — represent an asymmetric war because the enemy uses guerilla tactics and avoids direct confrontation, preferring ambushes. These enemies of peace have perfected their mode of operations. They infiltrate the civilian population and then attack them, at times drawing them in by wearing the uniforms of the FARDC. The international composition of that terrorist force, which consists of rebels of over six nationalities, deserves the attention of the international community.

Nevertheless, I must point out that for nearly a month, Beni has enjoyed a certain calm and the population has been able to go about its business. In late September, the military court in Beni, North Kivu, began to deal with crimes carried out against the civilian population of that region by holding hearings against members of the ADF who were captured during FARDC operations, with the support of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Death sentences have been handed down.

Allow me to also mention an element from South Sudan, the Sudanese People's Liberation Army, which is now on our territory. Indeed, in order to preserve friendly relations between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of South Sudan; avoid an atmosphere of suspicion with countries with which we share a long border; and no longer expose the long-suffering population of eastern Congo to the presence of foreign rebels, my Government has already informed the Council and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the decision taken by the Congolese people. We do not want Sudanese or South Sudanese elements — the Sudan People's Liberation Movement — on our territory. That Government position was reiterated to Council members by the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo when they visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Considering that the situation does not seem to be moving in the direction the Government would like, the Permanent Mission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo will once again address that issue through a note that it will present to the Council.

Allow me to also comment on the situation following the dialogues and the electoral process. The Head of State, respectful of the commitments undertaken by the States parties to the dialogue through the political agreement of 18 October, have recently — as many have pointed out — named a new Prime Minister from the political opposition. The long-awaited Government of national unity will soon be made public, with the primary mission of organizing presidential and legislative elections at the national and provincial levels, to be held in April 2018. In the meanwhile, the review of the voting register, which was launched in July, has been registering voters in 12 of the country's 26 provinces, and we have also started deploying electoral kits to all provinces. This

process will be completed by 31 January 2017, with the logistical support of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Independent National Electoral Commission plans to close the operation of revising the voting registry by 31 July 2017.

Pursuant to paragraph (b) of article V of the political agreement for the holding of calm, credible and transparent elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the convening of the electoral body by the Independent National Electoral Commission will occur on 30 October 2017. All the details of the electoral timetable will soon be made public by the Independent National Electoral Commission. Confidence-building measures to further ease the political environment and to foment trust among the political stakeholders are also part of the tasks of the national unity Government that will soon come into being.

In this difficult period for my country, my Government greatly appreciated the visit made by the members of the Council to the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 11 to 13 November. The Government is working on the recommendations made by the Council to maintain peace and security across the country. I wish to assure the Council that my country remains committed to respecting human rights. My delegation can affirm without hesitation that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is one of the countries of the region that is most respectful of human rights and whose democracy is among the most advanced and dynamic. It is true that not everything we do is perfect, but I assure the Council that efforts are being made to move forward.

My Government cannot restrict freedom of expression and assembly in a country of 400 political parties and 800 press and media organizations. The protective measure taken by the Governor of the city of Kinshasa to suspend public demonstrations for a certain time is not intended to stifle democratic expression. It has been taken solely for the purpose of protecting the population, which still bears the trauma caused by the sad events of 19 and 20 September.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes once again to express to the Council the gratitude of the Congolese people and their Government for the efforts of the United Nations to ensure peace and stability in their country. We take this opportunity to pay a final tribute to His Excellency Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon, to whom our people will remain indebted for all the achievements of the universal Organization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during his tenure.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.